# The Possibility of Resurrection and Other Essays in Christian Apologetics

*Peter van Inwagen*

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*To my stepchildren*
*Noël, Eamon, and Claire Lawless*

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# *Preface*

Several years ago, I published some of my essays on philosophical theology in a book called *God, Knowledge, and Mystery*. In a footnote in that book, I mentioned several essays on religious topics that, for one reason or another, I had not included. Spencer Carr, who was at that time the editorial director at Westview Press, was kind enough to suggest that the essays mentioned in that footnote might themselves make a book—provided an original essay were added to their number.

This is that book. The essay "Of 'Of Miracles'" appears here for the first time. The essay "Probability and Evil" is an extensive revision of parts of an essay called "Reflections on the Essays of Draper, Gale, and Russell," which appeared in Daniel Howard-Snyder, ed., *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 219–243. Some information and a few comments on the other essays follow.

"Quam Dilecta" appeared in Thomas V. Morris, ed., *God and the Philosophers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 31–60. This book is a collection of "personal statements" by various Christian philosophers. I am often asked what the title of the essay means. 'Quam dilecta'—'how lovely'; in *The Book of Common Prayer* 'how amiable'—are the first two words of Saint Jerome's vulgate translation of Psalm 84. It is a sort of nickname for the psalm: In liturgical churches, a psalm is often designated by the first two or three words of Jerome's translation. I could not think of an appropriate title for the essay, and because I had used a quotation from Psalm 84 as an epigraph, I put "Quam Dilecta" at the head of the manuscript till I could think of something else. Eventually, "Quam Dilecta" *became* the title.

"'It Is Wrong, Everywhere, Always, and for Anyone, to Believe Anything upon Insufficient Evidence'" appeared in Jeff Jordan and Daniel Howard-Snyder, eds., *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), pp. 137–153. (*Faith, Freedom, and Rationality* is a festschrift for William Rowe. The essay was originally written for the Chapel Hill Philosophy Colloquium, where it was presented in the autumn of 1994.)

"The Possibility of Resurrection" appeared in the *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 9 (1978): 114–121. It has been reprinted in Paul Edwards, ed., *Immortality* (New York: Macmillan, 1992) and in Louis P. Pojman, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology* (2nd ed.) (Belmont,

Calif.: Wadsworth, 1993). This is the only essay in this book that was not written from a Christian perspective. Nevertheless, I continue to accept its essential point. I have, however, added a postscript that contains some qualifications I now think are important.

"Dualism and Materialism: Athens and Jerusalem?" appeared in *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (1995): 475–488. This essay was written for a conference on Christianity and the philosophy of mind that was held at the University of Notre Dame in the autumn of 1995.

The remaining two "essays" are actually book reviews. I include them because in each of them I make what I believe are substantive points that are interesting independently of the content of the books under review. The review of O. K. Bouwsma's *Without Proof or Evidence* appeared in *Faith and Philosophy* 4 (1987): 103–108. The review of John Leslie's *Universes* appeared in *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (1993): 439–443.

I thank the editors and publishers of the books and journals in which the essays were originally published for permission to reprint them.

The essays are, as the subtitle of the book says, essays in Christian apologetics. They are defenses of one aspect or another of Christian belief in the face of intellectual attack. This, at any rate, is true, in the most straightforward sense possible, of Chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6. Chapter 4 ("Dualism and Materialism: Athens and Jerusalem?") and the two reviews are apologetic in a more indirect way: They are not responses to anyone's attack on some Christian belief, but—or so I should like to think—they make points that could in certain contexts be useful in defending Christian belief.

The essays are very much the work of a philosopher. Anyone who is familiar with the current philosophical scene will see easily enough that they employ intellectual tools whose use comes naturally to anyone who has been (as I have been) trained in "analytical" philosophy and who has spent most of his adult life using them (and not the tools of the theologian, the historian, or the scientist) in his attempts to get clear about things. Nevertheless, the essays are *mostly* not very technical. The reader who has not been formally trained in philosophy will probably not be able to make very much of "Probability and Evil" and will find "Of 'Of Miracles'" only marginally less difficult. The remaining essays can be read by those without special philosophical training.

*Peter van Inwagen*

# Chapter One

# *Quam Dilecta*

*Yea, the sparrow hath found her an house, and the swallow a nest, where she may lay her young; even thy altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King and my God.*

—Ps. 84:3

## I

Three of my grandparents were unchurched Protestants, and one (my father's mother) a devout Roman Catholic. As a consequence, my mother was, and is, not much of a churchgoer, and my father was a lapsed Catholic with pretty strong feelings on the subject—an enthusiastic reader of Paul Blanshard and similar authors. When I was seven, my parents briefly sent me to a Presbyterian Sunday school. Our lessons were from a little textbook with the excellent title *The King Nobody Wanted*, which I still occasionally come across in secondhand bookshops. I recall learning that we Christians believed that Jesus was the Messiah and that the Jews did not. (I remember wishing that I could have a chance to tell the Jews about Jesus; I was sure that they would be reasonable about his messianic status if someone were to inform them of it.)

I must also have absorbed the idea that Jesus was the Son of God, for, after my family had joined a Unitarian congregation, my father sternly informed me (presumably in response to some casual theological remark of mine) that we Unitarians did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God. Well, I was shocked. I had thought that everyone believed *that* (except, of course, the Jews, but it was pretty clear that Unitarians weren't Jews). I have a memory of walking through a hallway at my school—I think we've got to about age thirteen—and saying defiantly to myself, "I can believe that Jesus is the Son of God if I want to." I must have been wanting in what Roman

Catholic theologians used to call heroic faith, however, for I was soon enough a good little Unitarian boy. I learned in Sunday school that the feeding of the multitudes was really a miracle of sharing and how much more miraculous that was than a magical multiplication of loaves and fishes would have been if it had occurred, which of course it hadn't. (Twenty years later, in the early 1970s, Peter Geach told me how shocked he had recently been to hear the same story from a Roman Catholic priest. I was able to tell him that the Unitarians were at least twenty years ahead of Rome.)

My attachment to Unitarianism (and its three pillars: the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man, and the Neighborhood of Boston) did not survive my going away to college. That sort of thing is, of course, a familiar story in every denomination, but it's an easier passage for Unitarians, since it does not involve giving up any beliefs. My wife, who is one of my most useful critics, tells me that this is an unkind remark and ought to be omitted. It seems to me to be an important thing to say, however. I did not experience the crisis of conscience so common among Evangelical or Roman Catholic university students who leave the Church. And the reason is that if Evangelicals or Roman Catholics stop going to church, it is hard for them to avoid the question how they can justify not going to church when they believe what they do—if, indeed, loss of belief was not their reason for leaving the Church. It is, however, simply a fact that a Unitarian can sever his connection with Unitarianism without changing any of his beliefs.

If you had asked me about my religious beliefs when I was an undergraduate or a graduate student (a period that covered roughly the 1960s), I suppose I should have said I was an agnostic, although there was a brief period when I was in graduate school during which—under the influence of some version or other of the Argument from Evil—I should probably have said I was an atheist. This was a position of the head, not the heart, however: It had no more connection with my emotional life than, say, my belief (also briefly held in graduate school) that Quine had shown that quantified modal logic was impossible. My emotional life in the late 1960s, insofar as I had one, had entirely to do with the concerns of everyday life—although, to be sure, everyday life for a graduate student in philosophy is a little different from the everyday life of most people. A very important feature of my life as a graduate student was a growing conviction that I was a better philosopher than any of my fellow graduate students and most of my teachers. Vanity in this area—wounded vanity, because little attention was paid to me or to my work during the early years of my career—was a dominant feature of my inner life in the 1970s. (Professional vanity may well continue to dominate my inner life, but it would be harder for me to tell these days, since I now feel, rightly or wrongly, that my philosophical talents are adequately recognized by the profession. Wounded vanity is a rather more salient feature of one's inner life than self-satisfied vanity.)



When I was a graduate student, I began to read the apologetic works of C. S. Lewis. There were (under God) two reasons for this. First, I had loved his "space trilogy," and I was looking for "more Lewis." Secondly, I recognized him as a master of expository prose and thought—rightly—that I could learn a great deal from him about the art of expressing a line of argument in English. Like many other people, I first discovered what Christianity *was* from reading Lewis. The discovery was purely external, a matter of being able to use the right words when talking about "Christianity," but it was no small gain to have a *correct* external understanding of Christianity. I saw that the picture I had been given of Christianity by my Unitarian Sunday school teachers and various teachers of philosophy (no great difference there) was self-serving, frivolous, and wildly inaccurate. I saw that Christianity was a serious thing and intellectually at a very high level. (I was thinking, of course, in terms of propositions and distinctions and arguments.) I lost at that time, and for good, any capacity for taking any liberalized or secularized version of Christianity seriously. I could read Lewis. I could try to read Harvey Cox or William Hamilton. I could see the difference. To this day, I cannot see why anyone disagrees with my judgment that academic theologians of their stripe have nothing of interest to say. I have to admit, however, that some very learned people do disagree with this judgment.

The only thing was, I didn't believe it. I could see that there was an "it" to believe, and if I did not really see how much there was to being a Christian beyond having certain beliefs, I did see that the beliefs must come first and that a Christian life without those beliefs is an impossibility. One day in the late 1960s, I fell to my knees and prayed for faith, but faith did not come. I do not know what led me to make this gesture, but presumably there must have been some sort of felt pressure, and presumably this pressure did not long continue. I expect that I had been setting God some sort of test: If you don't give me faith on the spot, I'll conclude that you do not exist or are not interested in me and that these pressures I've been feeling have some sort of purely natural explanation and can be ignored till they go away. We all know how well that sort of thing works.

I married, spent two years in the army (at the height of the American military involvement in Vietnam; but I was safe in Germany), became the father of a daughter, and began to teach philosophy. I was entirely immersed in the secular world: Sunday was my day of rest and my day of nothing else. Although I continued to be interested in Christianity in an intellectual sort of way, it would no more have occurred to me to take up churchgoing—even as an experiment—than to take up hang-gliding or bookbinding. In 1973 I spent six delightful weeks on the campus of Calvin College at the National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute in the Philosophy of Religion, which was directed by Alvin Plantinga. As far as I am able

to tell by introspection and memory, this had nothing to with my religious development, although it had a great deal to do with my philosophical development. (Plantinga's lectures—which covered roughly the same ground as his book *The Nature of Necessity*—became for me a model for doing philosophy.) Besides my family, my only interests were philosophy and my career in philosophy. Perhaps my former wife and my daughter would say that the qualification "besides my family" is unnecessary. I certainly was taken up both with my researches and my desire to be recognized and admired. My researches, I think, went very well indeed, but I haunted my departmental mailbox mostly in vain and was subject to frequent periods of depression and spasms of anger because of my lack of professional recognition. The anger was directed at certain of my former teachers (the more famous ones) who, I believed, were in a position to advance my career and yet were doing nothing for me. I believed that they just didn't see how *good* I was and wasted their influence in advancing the careers of people who were less good than I. (I was never jealous of these other people, only envious: I didn't want them *not* to get what they got, but I wanted some, too.) When Al Plantinga wrote to Hector Castañeda, suggesting that a paper of mine be published in *Noûs*, and when Tony Kenny wrote to the Oxford University Press, telling them that I had a manuscript that they ought to try to get hold of, this made me even angrier with my teachers: "There," I said to myself, "That proves it. It *can* be done. Comparative strangers do it, but *they* don't." I sometimes wonder whether my teachers knew about this anger. My relations with them were entirely friendly whenever we met. This friendliness was not exactly hypocrisy on my part, since, as I say, the anger was not continuous but spasmodic, and I am not very good at being angry with people who are actually in the same room with me. (But I never once in a calmer moment repented these spasms of anger, which I always considered appropriate and fully justified.)

I can remember pretty well one feature of this period that is particularly relevant to my topic: what it was like not to have any religious beliefs. That is, I can remember pretty clearly certain episodes of thought that are possible only for the secular mind, but the memory is not "sympathetic"; it is a sort of looking at the past from the outside. Here is an analogy. Suppose that you now love someone you once hated. You might well be able to remember an episode during which your hatred manifested itself—say, in the writing of a letter in which you said terrible things to that person. You might remember very clearly, for example, hesitating between two turns of phrase, deciding that one of them was the more likely to wound, and choosing it on that account. But since you now love that person, and (presumably) cannot feel the way you felt when you hated, there is a good sense in which you cannot "remember what it was like" to write the letter. You are looking at your past from outside.



I shall try to describe three of these "episodes of thought." First, I can remember having a picture of the cosmos, the physical universe, as a self-subsistent thing, something that is just *there* and requires no explanation. When I say "having a picture," I am trying to describe a state of mind that could be called up whenever I desired and which centered round a certain mental image. This mental image—it somehow represented the whole world—was associated with a felt conviction that what the image represented was self-subsistent. I can still call the image to mind (I *think* it's the same image), and it still represents the whole world, but it is now associated with a felt conviction that what it represents is *not* self-subsistent, that it must depend on something else, something not represented by any feature of the image, and which must be, in some way that the experience leaves indeterminate, radically different in kind from what the image represents. Interestingly enough, there was a period of transition, a period during which I could move back and forth at will, in "duck-rabbit" fashion, between experiencing the image as representing the world as self-subsistent and experiencing the image as representing the world as dependent. I am not sure what period in my life, as measured by the guideposts of external biography, this transition period coincided with. I know that it is now impossible for me to represent the world to myself as anything but dependent.

The second memory has to do with the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead. I can remember this: trying to imagine myself as having undergone this resurrection, as having died and now being once more alive, as *waking up* after death. You might think it would be easy enough for the unbeliever to *imagine* this—no harder, say, than imagining the sun's turning green or a tree's talking. But—no doubt partly because the resurrection was something that was actually proposed for my belief, and no doubt partly because I as an unbeliever belonged to death's kingdom and had made a covenant with death—I encountered a kind of spiritual wall when I tried to imagine this. The whole weight of the material world, the world of the blind interaction of forces whose laws have no exceptions and in which an access of disorder can never be undone, would thrust itself into my mind with terrible force, as something almost tangible, and the effort of imagination would fail. I can remember episodes of this kind from outside. I can no longer recapture their character. I have nothing positive to put in their place, nothing that corresponds to seeing the world as dependent. But I can imagine the resurrection without hindrance (although my imaginings are no doubt almost entirely wrong) and assent, in my intellect, to a reality that corresponds to what I imagine.

The two "episodes" I have described were recurrent. I shall now describe a particular experience that was not repeated and was not very similar to any other experience I have had. I had just read an account of the death of Han-

del, who, dying, had expressed an eagerness to die and to meet his dear Savior, Jesus Christ, face to face. My reaction to this was negative and extremely vehement, a little explosion of contempt, modified by pity. It might be put in these words: "You poor booby. You cheat." Handel had been *taken in*, I thought, and yet at the same time he was getting away with something. Although his greatest hope was an illusion, nothing could rob him of the comfort of this hope, for after his death he would not exist and there would be no one there to see how wrong he had been. I don't know whether I would have disillusioned him if I could have, but I certainly managed simultaneously to believe that he was "of all men the most miserable" and that he was getting a pretty good deal. Of course this reaction was mixed with my knowledge that the kind of experience I tried to describe in the preceding example would make Handel's anticipation of what was to happen after his death impossible for me. I suppose I regarded that experience as somehow veridical and believed that Handel must have had such experiences, too, and must have been trained, or have trained himself, to ignore them.

In 1980 or thereabouts, I began to experience a sort of pressure to become a Christian: a vast discontent with *not* being a Christian, a pressure to *do something*. Presumably this pressure was of the same sort that had led me to pray for faith on that one occasion ten years earlier, but this was sustained. This went on and on. My mind at the time is not readily accessible to me in memory. I wish I had kept a journal. I know that sneers directed at God and the Church, which—I hope I am not giving away any secret here—are very common in the academy, were becoming intolerable to me. (What was especially intolerable was the implied invitation to join in, the absolutely unexamined assumption that because I was a member of the academic community I would, of course, regard sneering at God and the Church as meet, right, and even my bounden duty.) I perhaps did not have anything like a desire to turn to Christ as my Savior, or a desire to lead a godly, righteous, and sober life, but I did have a strong desire to belong to a Christian community of discourse, a community in which it was open to people to talk to each other in words like the ones that Lewis addresses to his correspondent in *Letters to an American Lady*. I envied people who could talk to one another in those terms. I know that I was becoming more and more repelled by the "great secular consensus" that comprises the worldview of just about everyone connected with the universities, journalism, the literary and artistic intelligentsia, and the entertainment industry. I knew that confused as I might be about many things, I was quite clear about one thing: I could not bear the thought of being a part of that consensus. What made it so repulsive to me can be summed up in a schoolyard cri de coeur: "They think they're so smart!" I was simply revolted by the malevolent, self-satisfied stupidity of the attacks on Christianity that proceeded from the consensus.



I remained in a state of uncertainty for some time. During this period, I described my state of mind by saying that I didn't know whether I believed or not. Eventually I performed an act of will. I asked my colleague and friend Bill Alston (to his considerable astonishment) to put me in touch with a priest. The priest I was put in touch with was—at that time and in relation to that particular need—of no help to me, but my interview with him took place in his study, which was in a church building. While I was talking with him, it became clear to me that a large part of my difficulty with the Church might be churches. It became clear to me that one fact about me that was of relevance to my condition was that I didn't want to start going to church. Well, I thought, at least that's a fact I can do something about. I decided to start going to church—simply to attend an early Eucharist every Sunday morning as a sort of observer, with no more commitment involved than five dollars for the collection plate. I began doing this. The first effect was that it put my wife into a fury, even though I was always home from church before she was awake. But I soon found that I liked going to church and that an unconscious fear of churchgoing was no longer a barrier between me and the Church. This would have been in September 1982, at just about the time of my fortieth birthday. The following May I was baptized. Following my baptism, I received my first Communion. Since then, the Sacrament has been the center of Christian devotional life for me. It is no more possible for me willfully to forgo Holy Communion on a Sunday than for me, say, to slander a colleague or to refuse to pay a debt.

And since then I have been an Episcopalian. I regard myself as a Catholic, and the Anglican communion as a branch (separated from other branches by historical tragedy) of the Catholic Church that is mentioned as an article of belief in the Creeds. I cannot easily see myself as a member of any other denomination, although I believe that the Episcopal Church is among the best possible illustrations of Robert Conquest's second law: Every organization appears to be headed by secret agents of its opponents. Eventually, I suppose, the high-minded progressives who control the denomination at the national level will do some truly appalling thing and I shall at last have to leave, but I hope I have a while left in the Episcopal Church, because I really do like the place. (An Anglican joke: "Why is Rome called the Eternal City? Because there's always Rome.")

As a Christian, I of course believe that conversions are the work of God and are thus largely invisible to the convert, save in their effects. Nevertheless, I believe, the convert must have turned to God and in some fashion have asked for his help. I have no useful memory of what I did to ask God for his help or of the form in which that help came. Naturally, I prayed—conditionally—but what it was about those prayers that was different from my prayer in the 1960s or what it was that I did besides pray is unknown to me.

I was allowed the usual honeymoon. The counterattack occurred in 1985. As might be expected with a person like me, it was an intellectual counterattack. At least, it was an intellectual counterattack in the sense that it had to do with propositions and evidence and arguments, and not with personal tragedy or sexual temptation or distaste for liturgical innovation or disillusionment with the behavior of my fellow Christians. But it was not an intellectual counterattack in the sense that it had much respectable intellectual content. A great deal of its content, in fact, was simply ludicrous, and I was perfectly well aware of that at the time, but that did not make it any less effective. One part of the counterattack was a real intellectual difficulty: I was extremely worried by Jesus' apparent prediction of the end of the present age within the lifetime of some of the witnesses to his earthly ministry. Nowadays I would say that I don't expect that the New Testament always gives an exact account of Jesus' words, and that the passages that worried me are probably a conflation of his prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem and his description of the End Times; I would say that this conflation was natural enough, given the beliefs of the early Church. And I would add to this that I am not sure it is inconsistent with a robust and orthodox theology of the Incarnation to hold that Jesus himself believed in an imminent Parousia (although I am not entirely happy about that idea). And not only would I say these things nowadays, but I said them (to myself, just about daily) for several years in the mid-1980s. The difference is that now I am perfectly comfortable with these arguments, and then they seemed like a wretched subterfuge to me. It's not that I perceived some flaw in them that I was unable to deal with. I perceived no flaw in them. They simply seemed like a wretched subterfuge to me, and that is all that there was to say about the matter.

The other parts of the counterattack are so flimsy that I am ashamed to record them. One derived from a newspaper report that a certain biblical scholar (a man who I later learned had written a book the central thesis of which was that Jesus was a hallucinogenic mushroom) maintained that unpublished material from the Dead Sea Scrolls contained prototypes from which the Gospels were derived, prototypes that antedated the birth of Jesus. The other had its basis in the claims of some physicists and cosmologists to be able to show (or to be about to be able to show) that the cosmos was somehow a thing that had come into existence literally out of nothing—that is, without any causal antecedents whatever, either temporal or ontological. I knew what to say in response to these arguments, of course. Anyone who thought about it would. I knew that this scholar did not claim to have *seen* these Gospel prototypes; rather, he inferred their existence from scraps of information about the unpublished Dead Sea Scrolls material by an elaborate Rube Goldberg (or Heath Robinson) chain of reasoning; I knew that he was demonstrably regarded by many scholars as a crank and



that his theory was endorsed by no one; I knew that he was fanatically hostile to Christianity. As to the physicists and cosmologists, their claim was philosophical nonsense, tricked out to look like sense by games played with the word 'nothing'. These things I knew then as well as I do now, but I could not make them real to myself. There was always a voice that whispered, "But this is not philosophy. You are not a biblical scholar or a physicist. You are out of your element here, and they are in theirs. Your criticisms are without value, you amateur."

The net result of my state of mind was fear. I was unable to read the Bible or to look at a newspaper article reporting the latest public pronouncement of some cosmologist about where the universe came from. And I was ashamed to seek help from my fellow Christians, since I knew that the things that were troubling me were nonsense, and I didn't want to look a fool. (And, at the same time, there was this quite inconsistent fear: Suppose I did ask and was told, "You know, that's always worried me, too. I don't know what to say about that. And those counterarguments you keep rehearsing to yourself are worthless, and I'll tell you why.") Perhaps the best way to describe my state of mind would be by an analogy. You don't believe in ghosts, right? Well, neither do I. But how would you like to spend a night alone in a graveyard? I am subject to night fears, and I can tell you that I shouldn't like it at all. And yet I am perfectly well aware that fear of ghosts is contrary to science, reason, and religion. If I were sentenced to spend a night alone in a graveyard, I should know beforehand that no piece of evidence was going to transpire during the night that would do anything to raise the infinitesimal prior probability of the hypothesis that there are ghosts. I should already know that twigs were going to snap and the wind moan and that there would be half-seen movements in the darkness. And I should know that the inevitable occurrences of these things would be of no evidential value whatever. And yet after I had been frog-marched into the graveyard, I should feel a thrill of fear every time one of these things happened. I could reason with myself: "I believe that the dead are in heaven or hell or else that they sleep until the General Resurrection. And if my religion is an illusion, then some form of materialism is the correct metaphysic, and materialism is incompatible with the existence of ghosts. And if the Church and the materialists are both wrong and there are ghosts, what could be the harm in a ghost? What could such a poor wispy thing do to one?" And what would the value of this very cogent piece of reasoning be? None at all, at least in respect of allaying my fear of ghosts.

Possibly, if one were subject to an irrational fear of ghosts, one would eventually lose it if one were forced to spend every night alone in a graveyard. Something like that seems to have happened to me as regards the irrational fears that underlay what I have called the counterattack. Eventually, they simply faded away. I am now unclear about what the time frame of all

this was. I know that the full force of it lasted for several years and that it was horrible. I am sure that I could say nothing that would convey the horror of it to someone who had not had a similar experience, just as someone who was "afraid of ghosts" (without believing in their existence) could do nothing to convey to someone who was free from this fear what was so horrible about spending a night alone in a graveyard or an abandoned and isolated house. The fears, while they lasted, were tireless and persistent. At one time I called them (to myself; I never spoke of these things, out of pride and shame) the barrage. Reason is impotent in such situations, since one is already intellectually convinced that there is nothing to fear. (Fear replies, "Ah, but you have reasoned wrong." "How have I reasoned wrong?" "I said, you have reasoned wrong.") And prayer, whatever its objective benefits, brings no immediate psychological comfort, as it can do in many kinds of affliction; on the psychological level, prayer merely aggravates the fear that there is No One There by making the question whether there is anyone there momentarily inescapable and letting the fears loose on it.

Somehow, with God's help, I got through this period. (I often wonder whether it was some kindergarten version of "the dark night of the soul," but I have never really understood what that phrase means.) I hope it never returns. I hope that the part of me on which it operated is dead, swallowed up in that death into which we are baptized. But God has, as is his usual practice, given me no guarantees, and, for all I know, it could all start again tomorrow.

There is not much more to tell about my life that is relevant to my topic. In 1987 my first wife, for reasons that I do not understand, insisted on a divorce. (This is perhaps the only bad thing that has ever happened to me, at least as the world counts bad things. I do not think I should make much of a martyr; I have not had the training.) The divorce was granted the following year, and the year after that I married Elisabeth Bolduc. Several years earlier, her husband had moved out and left her with a three-week-old baby and two older children. We met and were married in the church in which I had been baptized and confirmed.[1] Lisette, as my wife is usually called, is—besides being a deeply Christian woman—an extrovert with a strong personality and a vigorous emotional life. She thinks I am too intellectual and introverted and is determined to draw me out of myself. She may be succeeding. And then again, I may be too old a dog to learn new tricks.

At present my religious life is in what is sometimes called a dry period. I have trouble praying and "finding time" to read the Bible. I have almost no sense of myself as a sinner who needs the saving power of Christ, although, of course, I fully accept the *proposition* that I am a sinner who needs Christ. I can see perfectly well my pride and anger and sloth and lust and self-centeredness and callousness. I can see perfectly well that pride and anger and sloth and lust and self-centeredness and callousness are sins.



What I cannot do is to make the obvious logical consequence of these two objects of intellectual awareness real to myself. All of the particular acts that fall under these general headings (pride, etc.) "feel" all right to me because they are done by me—that is, in *these* mitigating circumstances, which only I appreciate. (Of course it was excusable for me to answer him in those words, after he looked at me like *that*.) Nevertheless, whether I should be or not, I am not greatly troubled or uneasy about this. I am somehow confident that God, having brought my intellect (at least to some degree) under his control, is patiently working inward and is beginning to achieve some sort of mastery over my passions and my appetites. I believe that parts of me that were diseased but vigorous ten years ago have been killed and replaced with grafts of living, healthy tissue. But it is obvious from my behavior and the shameful inner thoughts that I reveal to no one but God (and I sometimes catch myself thinking in ways that seem to presuppose that I can hide these thoughts even from him) that the process has a long way to go. I often feel as if God is saying to me (when I have formed, say, some shameful plan of revenge and humiliation), "You know, if it weren't for me, you would actually carry out that plan. Don't suppose that you are really capable of resisting the temptation to do things like that. In letting you have these thoughts, I am showing you what you would do if I ever left you to yourself, even for a moment."

## II

"Yes, yes, autobiographical narrative is all very well, but we want to know how you can possibly believe all that stuff."

A couple of years ago, I wrote a paper about New Testament criticism, which contained the following passage:

> I am a convert. For the first forty years of my life I was outside the Church. For much of my life, what I believed about the Church was a mixture of fact and hostile invention, some of it asinine and some of it quite clever. Eventually, I entered the Church, an act that involved assenting to certain propositions. I believe that I had, and still have, good reasons for assenting to those propositions, although I am not sure what those reasons are. Does that sound odd? It should not. I mean this. I am inclined to think that my reasons for assenting to those propositions could be written down in a few pages—that I could actually do this. But I know that if I did, there would be many non-Christians, people just as intelligent as I am, who would be willing to accept without reservation everything I had written down, and who would yet remain what they had been: untroubled agnostics, aggressive atheists, pious Muslims, or whatever. And there are many who would say that this shows that what I had written down could not really constitute good reasons for assenting to those propositions. If it did (so the objection would run), reading what I had written on those pages would convert intelligent agnostics, atheists, and Muslims to

> Christianity—or would at least force them into a state of doublethink or intellectual crisis or cognitive dissonance. Perhaps that's right. If it is, then among my reasons there must be some that can't be communicated—or *I* lack the skill to communicate them—like my reasons for believing that Jane is angry: something about the corners of her mouth and the pitch of her voice, which I can't put into words.[2]

I read the paper that contained this passage at a conference on philosophy and New Testament criticism at the University of Notre Dame, and Bas van Fraassen, who was in the audience, told me afterward that he did not think that I would find it as easy to write down "my reasons for assenting to these propositions" as I supposed. I had to admit that it was possible that he was right. To this day, I am not sure. But I am now going to put the matter to the test.[3]

I will present some arguments for the Christian faith. To set out these arguments, in my judgment, is to present those who attend to them with good reasons for accepting that faith. The arguments will almost certainly not convince anyone, but then such arguments as I might give for the truth or falsity of nominalism or regarding the deterrent powers of capital punishment would almost certainly not convince anyone either. It is often said that you can't argue people into faith. Well, I don't want to *dispute* that statement, but I do want to deprecate the idea that it is something worth saying. What *can* you argue people into? Faith—Christian faith, that is—is believing what the Church says (and continuing to believe it even when it is under the sort of "night in the graveyard" attack that I tried to describe in the preceding section). Would anyone say that you can't argue people into believing Plato's account of the trial of Socrates or into believing what the Democratic Party says about the superiority of its platform to that of the Republicans? I suppose that there is an element of truth in these two statements—argument is rarely coercive; in most areas of life, the best argument does not guarantee converts, even among the ideally rational—but argument is hardly irrelevant to the question whether one should believe the statements of Plato and the Democrats. In point of fact, no one ever does say things like this. The fact that people go about saying that you can't argue people into faith, and saying this as if it were an intelligent thing to say, is simply one more example of the double standard that I have been attacking.

There are several things I am not going to discuss that I might be expected to discuss in connection with arguments for the Christian faith. I am not going to discuss "arguments for the existence of God." Although I think that some versions of two of these arguments—the Design Argument and the Cosmological Argument—are as good as any philosophical argument that has ever been presented for any conclusion, I don't think that they have any more to do with my religious beliefs than, say, arguments for the existence of other minds have to do with my belief that my wife would never lie to me or my belief that democracy is a good thing. (I am going to touch on some matters related to the Design Argument, but I am in no sense going to *defend* that argument.)



I am not going to discuss "the problem of evil." I have said what I have to say on this topic elsewhere.[4] I have always regarded the problem of evil as simply one more philosophical problem: Every important system of belief raises philosophical problems, and the problem of evil is one that is raised by all religions that are founded on belief in a loving and all-powerful God. I think, of course, that what I have said in response to this problem is right. But that's a mere philosophical opinion. On a religious level, my belief is simply that there are good reasons for the evils we see in the world—and that this would be true even if everything *I* have said on the subject is worthless. If I may interject an autobiographical note at this point, I will mention that I have never had the least tendency to react to the evils of the world by saying, "How *could* there be a loving God who allows these things?" My immediate emotional reaction has rather been: "There *must* be a God who will wipe away every tear; there *must* be a God who will repay." (Or this has been my reaction as a believer. I don't think that as an unbeliever I had any sort of emotional reaction to the evils of the world.)

I am not going to discuss Christian mysteries—the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Eucharist, the Atonement. I have discussed two of these elsewhere,[5] but, on the religious level, my belief is that these apparently impossible things are real and are therefore possible. Christian mysteries are News, and the recipients of news are not always in a position to understand it perfectly. I believe that in relation to the Christian mysteries we Christians are like people who have never seen a mirror, or even a reflection in a pond, trying to grasp the nature of a mirror from listening to one of their fellows who has been shown a looking glass by a traveler. Perhaps the closest analogy the observer of the mirror can find is provided by pictures scratched in the sand: "A 'mirror' is a kind of flat plate that shows pictures like the ones we scratch in the sand, but they're three-dimensional—looking at a mirror is almost like looking through a window, even though the mirror has hardly any thickness and you just see an ordinary surface if you turn it round and look at the back—and they're in color, and they're absolutely perfect pictures (except that they're backward), and they change and move just the way real things do, and the mirror always shows pictures of the things right in front of it." One can easily imagine the conceptual havoc a skeptical philosopher among these people could wreak on this attempt at description. Nevertheless, considering the situation of the speaker and his audience, it's a good, practical description of a mirror. (It would, for example, almost certainly enable someone who had never seen a mirror to recognize a mirror on his first encounter with one.) In my view, creedal

descriptions of the Trinity and the Incarnation are good, practical descriptions of real things, descriptions that will do till we no longer see through a glass darkly. I am confident that they are at least as good as descriptions of curved space or the wave-particle duality in works of popular science.

I do not propose to say anything about religions other than Christianity. I have discussed this topic elsewhere and I have nothing more to say about it.[6]

I do not propose to discuss miracles and questions about the believability of reports of events that are contrary to the laws of nature. This is an important subject and one that I certainly should say something about, given the nature of my topic, but I do not have the space. If I had had sufficient foresight, I should already have written an essay on miracles that I could refer you to. Sorry.[7]

Now, finally . . .

Each of us accepts certain authorities and certain traditions. You may think that you are an epistemic engine that takes sensory input (that "fancifully fanciless medium of unvarnished news") and generates assignments of probabilities to propositions by means of a set of rules that yields the most useful (useful for dealing with the future stream of sensory input) probability assignments in most possible worlds. In fact, however, you trust lots of people and groups of people and—within very broad limits—believe what they tell you. And this is not because the epistemic engine that is yourself has processed a lot of sensory data and, in consequence, assigned high probabilities to propositions like 'Dixy Lee Ray is a reliable source of information on ecological matters' or 'Most things that the *Boston Globe* says about the homeless are true.' You may have done some of that, but you haven't had time to do very much of it.

As regards questions about the nature of the world as a whole and the place of humanity in the world, it is statistically very likely that you trust one or the other of two authorities: the Church or the Enlightenment. (But some readers of this essay will trust the Torah or the Koran or even—I suppose this is remotely possible—a person or book that claims access to some occult, esoteric wisdom.) What I propose to do in the sequel is to explain why I, who once trusted the Enlightenment, now trust the Church.

There is, I believe, an identifiable and cohesive historical phenomenon that named itself the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century and which, although it long ago abandoned the name, still exists. Like the Church, it does not speak with one voice. Like the Church, it has no central government. Like the Church, it is made up of many groups, some of which heartily detest many of the others—some of which, indeed, regard themselves as its sole true representatives and all others who claim to be its representatives as wolves in sheep's clothing. Like the Church, it has a creed, although, unlike the Church's creeds, its creed has never received an official formulation.[8] But that is a minor point. Its creed can be written down, and here it is:



There is no God. There is, in fact, nothing besides the physical cosmos that science investigates. Human beings, since they are a part of this cosmos, are physical things and therefore do not survive death. Human beings are, in fact, animals among other animals and differ from other animals only in being more complex. Like other animals, they are a product of uncaring and unconscious physical processes that did not have them, or anything else, in mind. There is, therefore, nothing external to humanity that is capable of conferring meaning or purpose on human existence. In the end, the only evil is pain and the only good is pleasure. The only purpose of morality and politics is the minimization of pain and the maximization of pleasure. Human beings, however, have an unfortunate tendency to wish to deny these facts and to believe comforting myths according to which they have an eternal purpose. This irrational component in the psyches of most human beings—it is the great good fortune of the species that there are a few strong-minded progressives who can see through the comforting myths—encourages the confidence game called religion. Religions invent complicated and arbitrary moral codes and fantastic future rewards and punishments in order to consolidate their own power. Fortunately, they are gradually but steadily being exposed as frauds by the progress of science (which was invented by strong-minded progressives), and they will gradually disappear through the agency of scientific education and enlightened journalism.

Various Enlightenment "denominations" such as Marxism or positivism or Freudianism or social Darwinism would insist that this statement of the Enlightenment creed omits certain extremely important propositions—even propositions that are absolutely crucial to an understanding of the world and humanity's place in the world. But I have tried simply to capture the highest common factor of the various schools of thought that compose the Enlightenment—the Apostles' Creed of the Enlightenment, as it were.

The Enlightenment has had its chance with me and I have found it wanting. I was once one of its adherents, and now I am an apostate. On the level of intellectual argument and evidence, it leaves a lot to be desired. And its social consequences have been horrible.

I am going to compare the attractiveness of the Church and the Enlightenment. I will group my comparisons into three parts. First, it seems to me, the teachings of the Church are, as I shall say, "congruent" with the facts of science and history in a way that the "creed" of the Enlightenment is not, and I shall discuss this. Secondly, I shall compare the "fruits" of the Church with the fruits of the Enlightenment. Thirdly, I shall compare the effects of adherence to the Church and to the Enlightenment in the lives of individuals.

The first matter for discussion is congruency. The preferred universe of the Enlightenment was constructed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is infinite in space and time, and it consists entirely of matter in motion. This universe was incompatible with the content of nineteenth-century science, even at the beginning of the century, and science became less and less hospitable to it as the century progressed. Nevertheless, this universe—that is, this picture of the universe—persisted in the popular imagination (which is what it was designed for) throughout the century, and it can be found in some circles even today. Today this picture is simply impossible. Present-day science gives us a universe that began to exist a specific number of years ago and may well be spatially finite; it is moreover governed by laws that contain a lot of apparently arbitrary numbers, and if these numbers were only a bit different, there would be no life: only a vanishingly small region in the space of all possible sets of physical laws is occupied by sets of laws that permit the existence of life, and the one universe there is is governed by a set of laws that falls within that minuscule region. It is of course possible to explain these things in terms other than those of theism. My point is that the Christian is right at home in such a universe, whereas the adherent of the Enlightenment would much prefer the universe of nineteenth-century popular science. That, after all, is the universe that was constructed by the imagination of the Enlightenment when the facts still allowed that imagination free play. But it is the universe that was constructed to fit the imaginations of Christians (unless its source was actually in divine revelation) that turned out to be consistent with what science has discovered. (Let's hear nothing about "fundamentalism." Some Christians are fundamentalists and are consequently unhappy with the universe of modern cosmology. But fundamentalism is one of the accidents of Christianity, not a part of its essence. If Saint Thomas Aquinas was a fundamentalist in the current sense of the word, Saint Augustine was not. And Aquinas, when he discusses Augustine's thesis that the "six days" of Genesis are a figurative description of six aspects of the created world, simply says that Augustine was wrong; he does not say that Augustine's views were heretical. A fundamentalist-turned-logical-positivist once called me a wishy-washy theological liberal because I read the book of Genesis in a way that was compatible with modern cosmology. I asked him whether he thought that Augustine was a wishy-washy theological liberal. "Yes," he said.)

Coming down to more modern times, cosmologically speaking, what the Enlightenment would really like is a universe bursting with life and chockfull of rational species.[9] But no one knows anything to speak of about the origin of life on the earth except that it is at present one of the great scientific mysteries. There is, therefore, no scientific reason to think that life is something that happens "automatically." It is pretty certain that there is no life elsewhere in the solar system, and the gleanings of the "search for extraterrestrial intelligence" have not been very encouraging to those who would like to think of the Orion Spur (our own little galactic neighborhood) as festooned with technological civilizations like ornaments on the Christmas tree it rather resembles. When these facts are combined with the fact that rationality has evolved only once on the earth (as opposed to forty times for vision and four for flight; and each of these evolutionary inventions is spread over hundreds of thousands of species, while rationality's meager score is one) and the fact that this event would not have occurred if a comet or asteroid had not happened to cause the mass extinctions of 65 million years ago, it begins to seem unlikely that the Enlightenment will get what it wants in this area. The Christian, on the other hand, is right at home in a universe in which humanity is the only rational species or is one of a small handful of them.



The Enlightenment would like it if humanity were continuous with other terrestrial animals, or at least very much like some of them. The Enlightenment would like this so much that it has actually managed to convince itself that it is so. It has even managed to convince itself that modern science has proved this. I remember reading a very amusing response made by David Berlinski to Stephen Jay Gould's statement that modern science was rapidly removing every excuse that anyone had ever had for thinking that we were much different from our closest primate relatives. Berlinski pointed out that you can always make two things sound similar (or "different only in degree") if you describe them abstractly enough: "What Canada geese do when they migrate is much like what we do when we jump over a ditch: in each case, an organism's feet leave the ground, it moves through the air, and it comes down some distance away. The difference between the two accomplishments is only a matter of degree."[10] I am also put in mind of a cartoon Phillip Johnson once showed me: A hostess is introducing a human being and a chimp at a cocktail party. "You two will have a lot to talk about," she says; "you share 99 percent of your DNA." I'm sorry if I seem to be making a joke of this, but . . . well, I *am* making of joke of this. I admit it. Why shouldn't I? The idea that there isn't a vast, radical difference, a chasm, between human beings and all other terrestrial species is simply a very funny idea. It's like the idea that Americans have a fundamental constitutional right to own automatic assault weapons: Its consequences apart, it's simply a very funny idea, and there's nothing much one can do about it except to make a joke of it. You certainly wouldn't want to invest much time in an argument with someone who would believe it in the first place.

The Enlightenment has, historically speaking, felt a certain affection for European civilization. (Admittedly, this affection is not what it used to be.) After all, European civilization produced the Enlightenment, so it can't be all bad. Nevertheless, the single greatest factor in the development of European civilization was the Church, so it can hardly be all good either. Best,

perhaps, to stress its similarities to other civilizations (no doubt we'd find native "Enlightenments" bravely struggling against the local superstitions in those other civilizations if we looked closely enough) and to ascribe its bad aspects to the Church and its good elements to the Enlightenment or to such "morning stars of the Enlightenment" as Roger Bacon and Copernicus. The main problem confronting this Enlightenment strategy is science.

Modern science—the kind of science of which Newton's derivation of Kepler's laws of planetary motion is a paradigm—has arisen only once in history. Oh, there has been some observational astronomy here and some attempt at systematic medical knowledge there. The achievements of the Greeks in taking the first steps down the path of science were magnificent, particularly in descriptive astronomy and statics—that is, in scientific studies that were essentially applied geometry. But the Greeks took a few steps down the road of science and faltered.

Here is the story the Enlightenment tells. There would have been a scientific revolution like that of sixteenth-century Europe in the classical world if the biblical literalism and otherworldliness of Christianity had not stifled ancient science and created the Dark Ages. Over a millennium later, science and the scientific method were reborn in the mind of Galileo (or maybe Copernicus had something to do with it). The Church persecuted Galileo, but it failed to kill the infant he had fathered and has been steadily losing ground to science ever since. (If you would like to see this story set out in more detail, consult A. D. White's *History of the Warfare of Science and Theology*.)

I don't want to get into an historical argument. I will simply tell another story, a story that is in my view better supported by the evidence. (This view is of course the view of an amateur, but a have, I suppose, as much right to it as any follower of the Enlightenment who was not a trained historian of science has had to the story told in the preceding paragraph.[11])

Ancient science discovered very little after about the time of the birth of Christ—which amounts to pretty quick work if Christianity stifled ancient science. The modern growth of science did not begin suddenly in the sixteenth century but was continuous with the natural philosophy of the High Middle Ages. (This has been well documented by Pierre Duhem.) There has been little persecution of science by the Church. There is nothing in the history of the relations of science and Christianity that can be compared with the Lysenko era in Soviet biology or the condition of science in Germany under the Nazis. When one looks carefully at the persecution of Galileo, the debate between Huxley and Bishop Wilberforce, or the Scopes trial, one finds that most of what one thought one had known about them isn't true, and that the real episodes do little to support the Enlightenment picture of a perpetual "warfare of science and theology."



Just as rationality has "happened" only once in the history of terrestrial life (unlike vision or flight), so science has "happened" only once in the history of humanity (unlike writing or the calendar). And the unique occurrence of science—*real* science, which does not stop with precise and systematic descriptions of phenomena but goes on to probe their underlying causes—happened in a civilization that was built upon the Church. The task of explaining why there was no science in India or China developed into something of an industry in the eighteenth century. To someone who shared the values of Voltaire, it was extremely puzzling that "rational" Confucian China, an ancient and settled civilization with a long history of scholarship and a demonstrated capacity for mechanical invention, should never have developed science. The failure of the much-admired classical world to develop science in the modern sense could be blamed on Christianity, but what was it to be blamed on in the case of China? After all, science had flowered in monk-ridden Europe, and it could hardly, therefore, be a particularly frail blossom;[12] why, then, not in China? The question was never satisfactorily answered. It has since been largely ignored. Two devices contribute to this. First, there is a tendency to use the word 'science' so broadly that at least some "science" can be found practically anywhere. If this does not solve the problem, it helps to sweep it under the carpet. Secondly, there is a tendency to identify the history of the world with the history of Europe. While this tendency has lately been much deplored by some of the current representatives of the Enlightenment (and rightly so), it has been useful to the Enlightenment, for it enables one to think of the birth of science as something that belongs to the history of "the world" rather than to the history of a particular civilization; since there is only one world, this makes the unique birth of science seem somehow less puzzling.

I would suggest that science is an outgrowth of Western Latin Christianity, connected with it in much the same way as Gothic architecture. (That is, the connections are historical and causal, not logical, and the causation is not inevitable.) I would suggest that the Christian worldview of the High Middle Ages produced a mental climate that made the birth of science possible.[13] (The suggestion has sometimes been made by representatives of the Enlightenment that a belief in miracles is inimical to science. Well, those who actually were responsible for the birth of science—Galileo and Newton, for example—believed in all of the miracles of the New Testament. It really is very hard to see how those who believe that in the normal course of events nature works by mechanical causes are going to be less effective scientists if they believe that miracles occur at special junctures in what Christians call salvation history—or even that they happen frequently at Lourdes. The real conceptual enemies of science are astrology and magic. There was a very dangerous outbreak of serious interest in astrology and

magic during the Renaissance, which the Church worked very hard to suppress.)

That the single birth of science occurred in Christendom is, therefore, a fact that is not congruent with the creed of the Enlightenment and which must, therefore, either be ignored or explained away by the Enlightenment. Christians, however, will be comfortable with the fact that the single most powerful instrument for understanding the world developed in a culture that had been shaped by (as they believe) a unique revelation of the mind and purposes of the Creator of that world.

I have left what I believe to be the single most important congruency for last.[14] All human beings are deeply, radically evil. (Are there no exceptions to this generalization? If there are, they are so rare that it is extremely unlikely that you or I have ever met one.) This evil may be only potential, but it is real. (In some cases it may be comparable to an as yet asymptomatic but deadly and inoperable cancerous tumor.) This fact can be hard for the citizens of a truly civilized society to realize, for it is the business of civilization to train people from birth not even to deliberate about certain acts. (We do not want our fellows to regard murder as a matter for rational deliberation.) It is, moreover, the business of civilization to attempt so to arrange matters that if any individual *does* regard rape or murder or fraud or false witness as a matter for deliberation, the contemplated act be fairly obviously unprofitable. But human history shows that the viewpoint of civilized people is parochial. It shows, moreover, that civilization is not necessarily a stable condition and that people who live in a civilized society have no right to expect that their great-grandchildren—or they themselves in their old age—will live in a civilized society.

The Christian doctrine of original sin comprises an etiology, a diagnosis, and a prognosis. I will mention only the diagnosis and one half of the prognosis: We are deeply, radically evil, and this condition is unalterable by any natural means. The Enlightenment, of course, does not accept this thesis. The Enlightenment holds either that human beings are naturally good or that they are neither good nor bad but simply infinitely malleable. In either case, the horrible way that human beings treat one another is regarded as a social artifact and as therefore eliminable, or at least reducible to tolerable proportions, by some form or other of social reorganization. This reorganization (whose nature representatives of the Enlightenment discover by thinking very hard about how society should be organized) will, as the case may be, allow the natural goodness of human beings to flourish or mold them into a form in which they will behave only in desirable ways. The reorganization is humanly possible, and when it has been achieved it will be stable. Rousseau and B. F. Skinner represent this point of view in its purest, most innocent form (innocent, that is, of contact with reality). But there are much shrewder thinkers who hold it in some recognizable form. It is not



clear to me how anyone could ever actually have held such a position, but that anyone could hold it in the late twentieth century is believable only because there it is, right before our eyes.

The Christian is able to have a realistic view of the human, past and present. The representative of the Enlightenment cannot. (At any rate most of them *don't.* I concede that a few of the people who have described themselves as "humanists" have had a realistic view of human nature. But they have never been listened to by the body of the Enlightenment.) It is extremely unfortunate that some Christians have abandoned the doctrine of original sin. As someone, Chesterton perhaps, remarked, they have abandoned the only Christian dogma that can actually be empirically proved. (True as regards the diagnosis and one half of the prognosis, at any rate.)

The Christian is also able to have a realistic view of himself or herself. As one Christian writer of the present century remarked, "We are none of us very nice." When I look back on the days of my allegiance to the Enlightenment, I discover that this allegiance was primarily a device to assist me in admiring myself. I still admire myself, I'm afraid, but at least I have silenced the voice of one flatterer. ("How intelligent you are," the Enlightenment would whisper in my ear, "how progressive, how, well, *enlightened.*") It may well be that not every adherent of the Enlightenment has used it that way; I do not claim to be able to look into the souls of the living, much less the long dead. But to read such Enlightenment figures as Hume or Voltaire with Christian eyes is to see every possible opportunity for self-admiration taken; and Voltaire and Hume, like me in my own Enlightenment days, do not seem even to be able to get on with the business of self-admiration without perpetual sneers at "milkmaids" (Voltaire)—that is, at the great mass of people who keep the wheels turning while the Enlightenment sips its chocolate and peers at them through its quizzing-glass. (The eighteenth-century Enlightenment—the Enlightenment proper, so to call it—no doubt hated kings and priests just as it said it did, but its real driving negative emotion was contempt for subjects and churchgoers. This is still true of the current representatives of the Enlightenment, mutatis mutandis.) I must admit, however, that I am not in a position to feel too terribly superior to Voltaire and Hume and my own past self. In theory, I accept the words of the hymn: "Foul I to thy fountain fly/Wash me Savior, or I die." In practice, of course, I mostly think I'm a pretty fine fellow. (I mean, I not only have all my native niceness, but I'm *religious* as well.[15]) But I'm sorry. Or I'm sorry I'm not sorry. And this is simple realism, however disinclined my heart may be to follow my head in this realism. The Enlightenment seems to be incapable of such realism.

I will now turn to my second kind of argument. "By their fruits ye shall know them," said Jesus. He was, perhaps, referring only to preachers and the doctrines they preached, but the saying has usually been taken in a

more general sense (possibly under the influence of Saint Paul on the fruit of the Spirit), and that is the way I shall take it.

I have mentioned one of the "fruits" of the Church: modern science. (I remind the Christian reader that I am at this point discussing only things whose existence would be admitted by a non-Christian.) There are others. One might mention democracy (we must remember that no Greek polis if it existed today would be described as a democracy), the concept of universal human rights and its embodiment in working constitutions, and the rule of law (law as opposed both to the momentary will of the sovereign and unalterable custom). Like science, these things are, according to the Enlightenment, inventions of the Enlightenment. But they arose in Christian nations, and most of the individuals who contributed to their development were Christians. I concede that the debt owed by all who cherish these things to certain representatives of the Enlightenment is very great. Thomas Jefferson certainly comes to mind. (If anti-Christians can admire certain Christians—Saint Francis, for example—despite their being Christians, I suppose it is allowable for me to admire certain representatives of the Enlightenment like Jefferson, despite their allegiance to the Enlightenment.) In fact, however, those Enlightenment figures who actually contributed to the development of those benign social institutions that are among Europe's greatest inventions were very imperfectly and selectively de-Christianized. If you want to see the social fruits of the Enlightenment in their pure form, you must look at the contributions to history of those who had consciously and decisively separated themselves from the Christian tradition and who based their political activities solely on Enlightenment theories. There is no point in looking at people like Tom Paine and Karl Marx who never actually held the reins of political power, for there is no way of determining how they would have used the forces of coercion that power places at one's disposal when they were faced with recalcitrant political reality. I would suggest Robespierre and Lenin as instructive examples.

The Enlightenment makes much of the suffering and death caused by the awful things Christians have done—the Crusades and the Inquisition seem to be the standard examples, although if I were to give the Enlightenment advice on how to conduct its case, I would suggest that it pay more attention to the Thirty Years' War. But with whatever justification these things can be ascribed to the Christian religion, such episodes as the Terror of the 1790s, the Great Terror of the 1930s, and Pol Pot's experiment in social engineering in the 1970s can with the same justification be ascribed to the Enlightenment. And these caused thousands of times as many deaths and incomparably greater suffering than all of the pogroms and religious wars in the history of Europe. The Crusades et al. were quite ordinary episodes in the immemorial string of crimes that mainly compose what the world calls history and what Saint Paul called this present darkness. The French Revolution was, as Burke was the first to realize, something new, a new kind of horror. The new kind of horror did not, of course, really hit its stride till about the 1920s. Let no one say that I have blamed the great post-Christian horrors of the past two centuries on the Enlightenment. My claim is this: Lay out an argument for the conclusion that responsibility for the crimes of the Crusaders and the Inquisition is to be laid at the door of Christianity, and I will produce a parallel argument of about equal merit—not very great, in my opinion—for the conclusion that responsibility for the crimes of the Committee of Public Safety, the Soviet Communist Party, and the Khmer Rouge is to be laid at the door of the Enlightenment.



Whether or not the Enlightenment is responsible for the French Revolution and Pol Pot, it has nothing positive to offer humanity. It cannot legitimately claim to be the author of science or democracy, and its creed leaves only an aching emptiness at the spiritual level. In matters of the spirit, it bakes no bread. In its attempts to undermine Christian belief, it has opened the door to all manner of substitutes that are, by its own standards—standards it has borrowed from the Church; it cannot create standards but can only edit the standards that the Church has made common currency—even worse than Christianity. The cult of the nation-state, Nazism, Satanism, "the jargon of authenticity," New Age fluff, and what is this year called "theory" in literature departments have rushed in to fill the vacuum in the human heart that the Enlightenment has created. As Chesterton remarked, when people stop believing in God they are not going to start believing in nothing; they are going to start believing in everything. In the end, the Enlightenment cannot survive; even if (by the standards of the world) it should destroy the Church, what replaces the Church at the social and cultural level will destroy the Enlightenment. Saturn's children will devour him. Those who doubt this should reflect on the actual fate of liberal humanism under Hitler or on the probable fate of liberal humanism under a politically established Age of Aquarius or under a triumphalist reign of "theory" in the universities.

Finally, I wish to consider the effects of the Church on individual lives. Here I must be brief, for there is no way that I can convey to you the evidence I am in possession of. I am, therefore, not talking about things whose existence is uncontroversial, although it is also true that I shall not be asserting the existence of anything that is in principle incompatible with the Enlightenment worldview.

There are many atheists I know, old-fashioned atheists of the Enlightenment type, who are singularly impressive people, people whose lives and behavior are worthy of the highest admiration. ("How, then, can you, as a Christian believe that without conversion and repentance these admirable people are lost?" That question is not to the present point, but I will make one brief remark. I would look at the issue raised by this question from the

other end: In the fact that even these admirable people cannot justify themselves before God, we see why it is that conversion and repentance are all the more necessary for the rest of us.) But each of these people is impressive in his or her own way. There are Christians I know, however, who are very impressive people, and their impressiveness is of a distinctively Christian sort. A common thread runs through their very diverse lives, and it is a Christian thread. I have never been able to discern an "Enlightenment" thread that runs through the lives of the admirable atheists of my acquaintance. There are five or six Christians I know who, for all the rich individuality of their lives and personalities, are like lamps, each shining with the same, dearly familiar, uncreated light that shines in the pages of the New Testament. I can no more doubt this judgment than I can doubt many of my much more everyday sorts of judgment to the effect that this or that person is kind or generous or honest or loving. When one is in the presence of this light—when one so much as listens to one of these people speak—it is very difficult indeed to believe that one is not in the presence of a living reality that transcends their individual lives. But there is nothing more I can say about this (except perhaps to say that I am sure that the reason I do not see *more* Christians as lamps is to be found in my own limitations; I have no tendency to believe that the people who look this way to me are closer to God than any other Christians are). I mention it only because not to mention it would misrepresent my claims about the reasons I have for being a Christian.

All of the things I have mentioned—congruency, the fruits of the Church, my perception of the lives of some of my Christian friends—are, in the meditation of my heart, woven together into a seamless garment. When I take all of these things into account, it seems to me that I must conclude that the Church speaks with authority. I do not see how anyone could regard the Enlightenment—or any individual Enlightenment "denomination"—as an authoritative voice. Its creed is not congruent with the world we live in, the social consequences of its influence have been disastrous, and it has nothing at all to offer "milkmaids" and nothing but opportunities for self-admiration to offer the intellectual and governing classes. If two voices tell radically different stories about the world and the place of humanity in the world, one speaking with authority and one with a meretricious pretense to authority, it does not follow that the former is right. Maybe no one is right. (The stories are logical contraries, not contradictories.) It is even possible that the meretricious posturer is right. But there is no way to believe only the logical consequences of what is uncontroversial and to believe very much, and no one—unless it were the inhabitants of some asylum—believes only the logical consequences of what is uncontroversial. It seems to me, however, that anyone who believes the Church in the world as it is is in a pretty good epistemic position (at any rate, a better epistemic position than anyone else who



is actually capable of functioning in the world). Maybe the only people who occupy a defensible epistemic position are skeptics—political and philosophical skeptics as well as religious skeptics. There is no way to show that that thesis is false. If there were, there would be a philosophically adequate refutation of skepticism. I believe, however, that the epistemic position of the Christian is demonstrably superior to any competing nonskeptical position, and it is for this thesis that I have tried to argue.

I am fully aware that my arguments will convert no one who is a firm adherent of any system of belief incompatible with Christianity. (If anyone who reads this essay thereupon becomes a Christian, that person was already a Christian—as regards propositional belief—when he began to read it; he just wasn't yet aware of the fact.) As I have pointed out, however, I could do no better with arguments for any controversial philosophical or political thesis—that is, for any philosophical or political thesis that is of any interest or importance.

I do not mean to suggest that my acceptance of the Church as an authority rests on my own unaided rational evaluation of the arguments I have given. No one who believes the Church could take that position, for the Church teaches that without the help of God, no one comes to Christian belief. But for all that, the arguments I have given may provide sufficient rational support for (or good reasons for accepting) Christian belief. An argument may provide sufficient rational support for a belief and yet be impotent to produce that belief in some (or all) of those who hear and understand the argument. Almost everyone would admit this as a general truth, whatever disagreements there might be about particular cases. I expect that all readers of this essay will grant that there are arguments that provide sufficient rational support for the following propositions: 'Jewish blood cannot be distinguished from Teutonic blood under a microscope'; 'The earth is considerably more than 6,000 years old'; 'The pyramids are not the work of extraterrestrial beings'. And yet there are those who have heard the arguments and deny the propositions. What I would say about the arguments that I have given is that, first, these arguments do lend rational support to Christian belief (but this assertion is not a part of my Christian faith; it is merely one of my opinions) and that, secondly, I require God's help to find them convincing—indeed, even to find them faintly plausible. Hume has said, "Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its [the Christian religion's] veracity: and whoever is moved by *faith* to assent to it is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience." The Christian who ignores Hume's ironic intent and examines this statement seriously will find that it is very near to the truth in one way and very far from it in another. God's subversive miracle is indeed required for Christian belief, but what

this miracle subverts is not the understanding but the flesh, the old Adam, our continued acquiescence in our inborn tendency to worship at an altar on which we have set ourselves. (For this is what Hume, although he does not know it, really means by "custom and experience.") And by this miracle the understanding is set free.

## Notes

1. I had considerable difficulty with the notion of remarriage. But there is little doubt that both my wife's first marriage and mine were invalid by the standards of Rome—hers in fact *has* been annulled, in a proceeding instituted by her former husband—and I suppose that there is no point in being more Catholic than the pope.

2. "Critical Studies of the New Testament and the User of the New Testament," in Eleonore Stump and Thomas Flint, eds., *Hermes and Athena: Biblical Exegesis and Philosophical Theology* (South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), pp. 159–190. The quoted passage occurs on pp. 176–177.

3. In the original printing of this essay, there followed at this point a long argument that was based on a comparison of religious beliefs with philosophical and political beliefs. The conclusion of this argument was that any reason for thinking that religious beliefs are "based on insufficient evidence" would be an equally good reason for thinking that philosophical and political beliefs are based on insufficient evidence. In this printing, I omit the passage in which this argument was presented because I later expanded it into a self-contained essay: Chapter 2 in the present volume.

4. See "The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy," *Philosophical Topics* 16, 2 (1988): 161–187, and "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence," *Philosophical Perspectives 5* (1991): 135–165. See also Chapter 5 in the present volume.

5. See "And Yet They Are Not Three Gods But One God," in Thomas V. Morris, ed., *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), pp. 241–278, and "Not by Confusion of Substance But by Unity of Person," included in Alan Padgett, ed., *Reason and the Christian Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 201–226.

6. See "Non Est Hick," in Thomas D. Senor, ed., *The Rationality of Belief and the Plurality of Faith* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 216–241.

7. The sixth essay in the present volume was written, as academic bureaucrats say, "in partial fulfillment of this requirement."

8. See, however, the two "humanist manifestoes" issued by the American Humanist Association. They are printed together in *Humanist Manifestoes I and II* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1973). They are pretty mealymouthed compared with the "creed" in the text, and they are written in the worst sort of academic prose (". . . the nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values . . . "), but they come to much the same thing.

9. For evidence that this is what the Enlightenment would really like, see Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 170–181.

10. I am sorry to say that I do not remember where I read this.



11. My amateurish views on the history of science have been deeply influenced by the work of Stanley L. Jaki. I refer the interested reader to his Gifford Lectures, published as *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

12. But the story about this is somewhat confused. The Enlightenment believed that the young Church had stifled the vigorous adolescent science of antiquity but that the powerful Church of the sixteenth century was unable to dispose of the infant science of its day.

13. I have said something about the way in which (in my view) the Christian worldview made the birth of science possible in a note (n. 15) to "Non Est Hick."

14. George Mavrodes has presented a very interesting "congruency" argument in his essay "Religion and the Queerness of Morality," in Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright, eds., *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment: New Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 213–226. Mavrodes's thesis is that Christianity—or, more generally, a certain kind of theism—is congruent with a belief in the reality of moral obligation and that the creed of the Enlightenment is not.

15. I have borrowed this marvelous sentence from a talk I once heard Eleonore Stump give.

## Chapter Two

# *"It Is Wrong, Everywhere, Always, and for Anyone, to Believe Anything upon Insufficient Evidence"*

My title is a famous sentence from W. K. Clifford's celebrated lecture "The Ethics of Belief."[1] What I want to do is not so much to challenge (or to vindicate) the principle this sentence expresses as to examine what the consequences of attempting consistently to apply it in our lives would be. Various philosophers have attempted something that might be described in these words and have argued that a strict adherence to the terms of the principle would lead to a chain of requests for further evidence that would terminate only in such presumably unanswerable questions as "What evidence have you for supposing that your sensory apparatus is reliable?" or "Yes, but what considerations can you adduce in support of the hypothesis that the future *will* resemble the past?" and they have drawn the conclusion that anyone who accepts such propositions as that one's sensory apparatus is reliable or that the future will resemble the past must do so in defiance of the principle. You will be relieved to learn that an investigation along these lines is not on the program tonight. I am not going to raise the question whether a strict adherence to the principle would land us in the one of those very abstract sorts of epistemological predicament exemplified by uncertainty about the reliability of sense perception or induction. I shall be looking at consequences of accepting the principle that are much more con-

crete, much closer to our concerns as epistemically responsible citizens—citizens not only of the body politic but of the community of philosophers.

I shall, as I say, be concerned with Clifford's sentence and the lecture that it epitomizes. But I am going to make my way to this topic by a rather winding path. Please bear with me for a bit.

I begin my indirect approach to Clifford's sentence by stating a fact about philosophy. Philosophers do not agree about anything to speak of. That is, it is not very usual for agreement among philosophers on any important philosophical issue to be describable as being, in a quite unambiguous sense, common. Oh, this philosopher may agree with that philosopher on many philosophical points; for that matter, if this philosopher is a former student of that philosopher, they may even agree on *all* philosophical points. But you don't find universal or near universal agreement about very many important theses or arguments in philosophy. Indeed, it would be hard to find an important philosophical thesis that, say, 95 percent of, say, American analytical philosophers born between 1930 and 1950 agreed about in, say, 1987.

And why not? How can it be that equally intelligent and well-trained philosophers can disagree about the freedom of the will or nominalism or the covering-law model of scientific explanation when each is aware of all of the arguments and distinctions and other relevant considerations that the others are aware of? How—and now I will drop a broad hint about where I am going—how can we philosophers possibly regard ourselves as justified in believing much of anything of philosophical significance in this embarrassing circumstance? How can *I* believe (as I do) that free will is incompatible with determinism or that unrealized possibilities are not physical objects or that human beings are not four-dimensional things extended in time as well as in space, when David Lewis—a philosopher of truly formidable intelligence and insight and ability—rejects these things I believe and is already aware of and understands perfectly every argument that I could produce in their defense?

Well, I *do* believe these things. And I believe that I am justified in believing them. And I am confident that I am right. But how can I take these positions? I don't know. That is itself a philosophical question, and I have no firm opinion about its correct answer. I suppose my best guess is that I enjoy some sort of philosophical insight (I mean in relation to these three particular theses) that, for all his merits, is somehow denied to Lewis. And this would have to be an insight that is incommunicable—at least *I* don't know how to communicate it—for I have done all I can to communicate it to Lewis, and he has understood perfectly everything I have said, and he has not come to share my conclusions. But maybe my best guess is wrong. I'm confident about only one thing in this area: The question must have some good answer. For not only do my beliefs about these questions seem to me



to be undeniably *true*, but (quite independently of any consideration of which theses it is that seem to me to be true), I don't want to be forced into a position in which I can't see my way clear to accepting any philosophical thesis of any consequence. Let us call this unattractive position "philosophical skepticism." (Note that I am not using this phrase in its usual sense of "comprehensive and general skepticism based on philosophical argument." Note also that philosophical skepticism is not a thesis—if it were, it's hard to see how it could be accepted without pragmatic contradiction—but a state: Philosophical skeptics are people who can't see their way clear to being nominalists or realists, dualists or monists, ordinary-language philosophers or phenomenologists; people, in short, who are aware of many philosophical options but take none of them, people who have listened to many philosophical debates but have never once declared a winner.) I think that any philosopher who does not wish to be a philosophical skeptic—I know of no philosopher who *is* a philosophical skeptic—must agree with me that this question has some good answer: Whatever the reason, it must be possible for one to be justified in accepting a philosophical thesis when there are philosophers who, by *all* objective and external criteria, are at least equally well qualified to pronounce on that thesis and who reject it.

Will someone say that philosophical theses are theses of a very special sort and that philosophy is therefore a special case? That adequacy of evidential support is much more easily achieved in respect of philosophical propositions than in respect of geological or medical or historical propositions? Perhaps because nothing really hangs on philosophical questions, and a false or unjustified philosophical opinion is therefore harmless? Or because philosophy is in some sense not about matters of empirical fact? As to the first of these two suggestions, I think it is false that nothing hangs on philosophical questions. What people have believed about the philosophical theses advanced by, for example, Plato, Locke, and Marx has had profound effects on history. I don't know what the world would be like if everyone who ever encountered philosophy immediately became, and thereafter remained, a philosophical skeptic, but I'm willing to bet it would be a vastly different world. (In any case, I certainly *hope* this suggestion is false. I'd hate to have to defend my own field of study against a charge of adhering to loose epistemic standards by arguing that it's all right to adopt loose epistemic standards in philosophy because philosophy is detached from life to such a degree that philosophical mistakes can't do any harm.)

In a more general, theoretical way, Clifford argues, and with some plausibility, that it is *in principle* impossible to claim on behalf of any subject matter whatever—on the ground that mistaken beliefs about the things of which that subject matter treats are harmless—exemption from the strict epistemic standards to which, say, geological, medical, and historical beliefs are properly held. He argues,

> [That is not] truly a belief at all which has not some influence upon the actions of him who holds it. He who truly believes that which prompts him to an action has looked upon the action to lust after it, he has committed it already in his heart. If a belief is not realized immediately in open deeds, it is stored up for the guidance of the future. It goes to make a part of that aggregate of beliefs which is the link between sensation and action at every moment of all our lives, and which is so organized and compacted together that no part of it can be isolated from the rest, but every new addition modifies the structure of the whole. No real belief, however trifling and fragmentary it may seem, is ever truly insignificant; it prepares us to receive more of its like, confirms those which resembled it before, and weakens others; and so gradually it lays a stealthy train in our inmost thoughts, which may some day explode into overt action, and leave its stamp upon our character forever. . . . And no one man's belief is in any case a private matter which concerns himself alone. . . . [N]o belief held by one man, however seemingly trivial the belief, and however obscure the believer, is actually insignificant or without its effect on the fate of mankind. . . .

Whether or not you find this general, theoretical argument convincing, it does in any case seem quite impossible to maintain, given the actual history of the relation between philosophy and our social life, that it makes no real difference what people believe about philosophical questions.

The second suggestion—that philosophy is "different" (and that philosophers may therefore properly, in their professional work, observe looser epistemic standards than geologists or physicians observe in theirs) because it's not about matters of empirical fact—is trickier. Its premise is not that it doesn't make any difference what people believe about philosophical questions; it's rather that the world would look exactly the same whether any given philosophical thesis was true or false. I think that that's a dubious assertion. If the declarative sentences that philosophers characteristically write and speak in their professional capacity are meaningful at all, then many of them express propositions that are *necessary* truths or *necessary* falsehoods, and it's at least a very doubtful assertion that the world would look the same if some necessary truth were a falsehood or if some necessary falsehood were a truth. (Would anyone argue that mathematicians may properly hold themselves to looser epistemic standards than geologists because the world would look the same whether or not there was a greatest prime?) And even if it were true that philosophy was, in no sense of this versatile word, "about" matters of empirical fact, one might well raise the question why this should lend any support to the suggestion that philosophers were entitled to looser epistemic standards than geologists or physiologists, given that philosophical beliefs actually do have important effects on the behavior of those who hold them. Rather than address the issues that these speculations raise, however, I will simply change the subject.



Let us consider politics. Almost everyone will admit that it makes a difference what people believe about politics—I am using the word in its broadest possible sense—and it would be absurd to say that propositions like "Capital punishment is an ineffective deterrent" or "Nations that do not maintain a strong military capability actually increase the risk of war" are not about matters of empirical fact. And yet people disagree about these propositions (and scores of others of equal importance), and their disagreements about them bear a disquieting resemblance to the disagreements of philosophers about nominalism and free will and the covering-law model. That is, their disagreements are matters of interminable debate, and impressive authorities can be found on both sides of many of the interminable debates.

It is important to realize that this feature of philosophy and politics is not a universal feature of human discourse. It is clear, for example, that someone who believes in astrology believes in something that is simply indefensible. It would be hard to find a philosopher—I *hope* this is true—who believed that every philosopher who disagreed with his or her position on nominalism held a position that was indefensible in the same way that a belief in astrology was indefensible. It might be easier to find someone who held the corresponding position about disputed and important political questions. I suspect there really are people who think that those who disagree with them about the deterrent effect of capital punishment or the probable consequences of unilateral disarmament are not only mistaken but hold beliefs that are indefensible in the way that a belief in astrology is indefensible. I can only say that I regard this attitude as ludicrous. On each side of many interminably debated political questions—it is not necessary to my argument to say *all*—one can find well-informed (indeed, immensely learned) and highly intelligent men and women who adhere to the very highest intellectual standards. And this is simply not the case with debates about astrology. In fact, it is hardly possible to suppose that there could be a very *interesting* debate about the truth-values of the claims made by astrologers.

Everyone who is intellectually honest will admit this, will admit that there are interminable political debates with highly intelligent and well-informed people on both sides. And yet few will react to this state of affairs by becoming political skeptics, by declining to have any political beliefs that are disputed by highly intelligent and well-informed people. But how can this rejection of political skepticism be defended? How can responsible political thinkers believe that the Syndicalist Party is the last, best hope for Ruritania when they know full well that there are well-informed (even immensely learned) and highly intelligent people who argue vehemently—all the while adhering to the highest intellectual standards—that a Syndicalist government would be the ruin of Ruritania? Do the friends of Syndicalism claim to see gaps in the arguments of their opponents, "facts" that they have cited that are not really facts, real facts that they have chosen not to

mention, a hidden agenda behind their opposition to Syndicalism? No doubt they do. Nevertheless, if they are intelligent and intellectually honest, they will be aware that if these claims were made in public debate, the opponents of Syndicalism would probably be able to muster a very respectable rebuttal. The friends of Syndicalism will perhaps be confident that they could effectively meet the points raised in this rebuttal, but if they are intelligent and intellectually honest, they will be aware . . . and so, for all practical purposes, ad infinitum.

I ask again: What could it be that justifies us in rejecting political skepticism? How can *I* believe that my political beliefs are justified when these beliefs are rejected by people whose qualifications for engaging in political discourse are as impressive as David Lewis's qualifications for engaging in philosophical discourse? These people are aware of (at least) all the evidence and all the arguments that I am aware of, and they are (at least) as good at evaluating evidence and arguments as I. How, then, can I maintain that the evidence and arguments I can adduce in support of my beliefs actually justify these beliefs? If this evidence and these arguments are capable of that, then why aren't they capable of convincing these other people that these beliefs are correct? Well, as with philosophy, I am inclined to think that I must enjoy some sort of incommunicable insight that the others, for all their merits, lack. I am inclined to think that "the evidence and arguments I can adduce in support of my beliefs" do not constitute the totality of my justification for these beliefs. But all that I am willing to say for sure is that *something* justifies me in rejecting political skepticism, or at least that it is *possible* that something does: that it is not a necessary truth that one is not justified in holding a political belief that is controverted by intelligent and well-informed political thinkers.

I have now accomplished one of the things I wanted to do in this essay. I have asked how it is possible to avoid philosophical and political skepticism. In the remainder of this essay, I turn to questions about religious belief. My point in raising the questions I have raised about philosophy and politics was primarily to set the stage for comparing religious beliefs with philosophical and political beliefs. But I think that the questions I have so far raised are interesting in their own right. Even if everything I say in the remainder of the talk is wrong, even if my comparisons of philosophical and political beliefs with religious beliefs turn out to be entirely wide of the mark, the interest of the questions I have raised so far would remain. How can we philosophers, when we consider the matter carefully, avoid the uncomfortable suspicion that the following words of Clifford might apply to *us*: "Every one of them, if he chose to examine himself *in foro conscientiae*, would know that he had acquired and nourished a belief, when he had no right to believe on such evidence as was before him; and therein he would know that he had done a wrong thing"?



Now as to religion: Is religion different from philosophy and politics in the respects we have been discussing? Should religious beliefs perhaps be held to a stricter evidential standard than philosophical and political beliefs? Or if they are to be held to the same standard, do typical religious beliefs fare worse under this standard than typical philosophical or political beliefs? It is an extremely popular position that religion *is* different. Or at least it must be that many antireligious philosophers and other writers hostile to religious belief hold this position, for it seems to be presupposed by almost every aspect of their approach to the subject of religious belief. And yet this position seems never to have been explicitly formulated, much less argued for. Let us call it the Difference Thesis. An explicit formulation of the Difference Thesis is a tricky matter. I tentatively suggest that it be formulated disjunctively: Either religious beliefs should be held to a stricter epistemic standard than beliefs of certain other types—of which philosophical and political beliefs are the paradigms—or if they are to be held to the same epistemic standard as other beliefs, they typically fare worse under this standard than typical beliefs of most other types, including philosophical and political beliefs. I use this disjunctive formulation because while I think I see some sort of difference thesis at work in much of the hostile writing on the epistemic status of religious belief, the work of this thesis is generally accomplished at a subliminal level and it is hard to get a clear view of it. I suspect that some of the writers I have alluded to are thinking in terms of one of the disjuncts and some in terms of the other.

A good example of the Difference Thesis at work is provided by Clifford's lecture. One of the most interesting facts about "The Ethics of Belief" is that nowhere in it is religious belief explicitly discussed. There are, to be sure, a few glancing references to religion in the lecture, but the fact that they are references to religion, while it doubtless has its polemical function, is never essential to the point that Clifford professes to be making. Clifford's shipowner, for example, comes to his dishonest belief partly because he puts his trust in Providence, but Clifford could have made the same philosophical point if he had made the shipowner come to his dishonest belief because he had put his trust in his brother-in-law. Clifford's other main illustrative case is built round an actual Victorian scandal (described in coyly abstract terms: "There was once a certain island in which . . . ") involving religious persecution. But he could have made the same philosophical point if he had described a case of purely secular persecution, such as those that attended the investigations of Senator McCarthy; his illustration turned simply on the unwillingness of zealous agitators, convinced that the right was on their side, to examine certain matters of public record and to obtain easily available testimony. In both of Clifford's illustrative cases, there is a proposition that is dishonestly accepted, accepted without sufficient attention to the available evidence. In neither case is it a religious or

theological proposition. And at no point does Clifford come right out and say that his arguments have any special connection with religious beliefs. It would, however, be disingenuous in the extreme to say that "The Ethics of Belief" is simply about the ethics of belief in general and is no more directed at religious belief than at any other kind of belief. "Everyone knows," as the phrase goes, that Clifford's target is religious belief. (Certainly the editors of anthologies know this. "The Ethics of Belief" appears in just about every anthology devoted to the philosophy of religion. It has never appeared in an anthology devoted to epistemology.[2] I know of only one case in which anyone writing on general epistemological questions has mentioned Clifford's lecture, and that is a very brief footnote in Chisholm's *Perceiving*, in the chapter entitled "The Ethics of Belief." In that note, Chisholm simply says that he holds a weaker thesis about the ethics of belief than Clifford's. Given that he had borrowed Clifford's title for his chapter title, I suppose that that was the least he could have done.)

The real thesis of Clifford's lecture (its subtext, as our friends in the literature departments say) is that religious beliefs—belief in God; belief in an afterlife; belief in the central historical claims of Judaism or Christianity or Islam—are always or almost always held in ways that violate the famous ethico-epistemic principle whose quotation-name is my title: "It is wrong, always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence." If, moreover, he is of the opinion that beliefs in any other general category are always or almost always (or typically or rather often) held in ways that violate his principle, this is certainly not apparent.

This conviction that Clifford's specific target is religious belief is no knee-jerk reaction of overly sensitive religious believers or of antireligious polemicists eager to find yet another stick to beat churchgoers with. If the conviction is not supported by his argument, in the strictest sense of the word, it is well grounded in his rhetoric. For one thing, the lecture abounds in biblical quotations and echoes, which is not a usual feature of Clifford's prose. For another, there are the inessential religious elements in both of his illustrative examples. Much more importantly, however, there are two passing allusions to religious belief, which, although they go by rather quickly, are nevertheless writ in letters that he who runs may read. First, one of the dishonest comforts provided by certain beliefs that are not apportioned to evidence is said to be this: They "... add a tinsel splendor to the plain straight road of our life and display a bright mirage beyond it." Secondly, when Clifford raises the question whether it is fair to blame people for holding beliefs that are not supported by evidence if they hold these beliefs as a result of their having been trained from childhood not to raise questions of evidence in certain areas, he refers to these unfortunates as "those simple souls ... who have been brought up from the cradle with a horror of doubt, and taught that their eternal welfare depends on what they believe. ..."



Let us call Clifford's principle—"It is wrong, always, everywhere, and for anyone ... "—Clifford's Principle, which seems an appropriate enough name for it. I should note that there seems to be another principle that Clifford sometimes appeals to and which he neither articulates nor distinguishes clearly from Clifford's Principle. Call it Clifford's Other Principle. It is something very much like this: "It is wrong, always, everywhere, and for anyone to ignore evidence that is relevant to his beliefs or to dismiss relevant evidence in a facile way." Clifford's Other Principle is obviously not Clifford's Principle. It is very doubtful whether someone who satisfied the requirements of Clifford's Principle would necessarily satisfy the requirements of Clifford's Other Principle (it could be argued that it would be possible to have evidence that justified one's accepting a certain proposition even though one had deliberately chosen not to examine certain other evidence that was relevant to the question whether to accept that proposition), and it is pretty certain that someone who satisfied the requirements of Clifford's Other Principle would not necessarily satisfy the requirements of Clifford's Principle. I suspect that Clifford tended to conflate the two principles because of a combination of his antireligious agenda with an underlying assumption that the evidence, such as it is, that people have for their religious beliefs is inadequate because it is incomplete, and incomplete because these believers have declined to examine certain evidence relevant to their beliefs, owing to a subconscious realization that examination of this evidence would deprive even them of the power to continue to hold their cherished beliefs.

However this may be, having distinguished Clifford's Other Principle from Clifford's Principle, I am not going to discuss it further, beyond pointing out that there does not seem to be any reason to suppose, whatever Clifford may have thought, that those who hold religious beliefs are any more likely to be in violation of Clifford's Other Principle than those who hold philosophical or political beliefs. We all know that there are a lot of people who have violated Clifford's Other Principle at one point or another in the course of arriving at their political beliefs and a few who have not. As to philosophy, well, I'm sure that violations of Clifford's Other Principle are quite rare among professional philosophers. No doubt there are a few cases, however. One might cite, for example, a recent review of a book by John Searle, in which the author of the review (Dan Dennett) accuses Searle of gross violations of Clifford's Other Principle in his (Searle's) descriptions of current theories in the philosophy of mind. If Dennett's charge is not just, then it is plausible to suppose that *he* is in violation of Clifford's Other Principle. So it can happen, even among us. But let us, as the French say, return to our sheep, prominent among which is Clifford's Principle—Clifford's Principle proper, that is, and not Clifford's Other Principle.

It is interesting to note that Clifford's Principle is almost never mentioned by writers subsequent to Clifford except in hostile examinations of reli-

gious belief, and that the antireligious writers who mention it never apply it to anything but religious beliefs (with the exception of illustrative examples—like Clifford's example of the irresponsible shipowner—that are introduced in the course of explaining its content and arguing for it). It is this that provides the primary evidence for my contention that many antireligious philosophers and other writers against religion tacitly accept the Difference Thesis: The fact that they apply Clifford's Principle only to religious beliefs is best explained by the assumption that they accept the Difference Thesis. The cases of Marxism and Freudianism are instructive examples of what I am talking about. It is easy to point to philosophers who believe that Marxism and Freudianism are nonsense: absurd parodies of scientific theories that get the real world wildly wrong. Presumably these philosophers do not believe that Marxism and Freudianism were adequately supported by the evidence that was available to Marx and Freud—or that they are adequately supported by the evidence that is available to any of the latter-day adherents of Marxism and Freudianism. But never once has any writer charged that Marx or Freud blotted his epistemic escutcheon by failing to apportion belief to evidence. I challenge anyone to find me a passage (other than an illustrative passage of the type I have mentioned) in which any devotee of Clifford's Principle has applied it to anything but religious belief. And yet practically all philosophers—the literature will immediately demonstrate this to the most casual inquirer—subscribe to theses an obvious logical consequence of which is that the world abounds in gross violations of Clifford's Principle that have nothing to do with religion.

An explanation of the widespread tacit acceptance of the Difference Thesis among those who appeal to Clifford's Principle in their attacks on religious belief is not far to seek. If Clifford's Principle were generally applied in philosophy (or in politics or history or even in many parts of the natural sciences), it would have to be applied practically everywhere. If its use became general, we'd all be constantly shoving it in one another's faces. And there would be no comfortable reply open to most of the recipients of a charge of violating Clifford's Principle. Use every man after his desert, and who shall scape whipping? If, for example, I am an archaeologist who believes that an artifact found in a Neolithic tomb was a religious object used in a fertility rite, and if my rival, Professor Graves—a professor, according to the German aphorism, is someone who thinks otherwise—believes that it was used to wind flax, how can I suppose that my belief is supported by the evidence? If my evidence really supports my belief, why doesn't it convert Professor Graves, who is as aware of it as I am, to my position?

This example, of course, is made up. But let me mention a real and not entirely dissimilar example that I recently came across in a review by Malcolm W. Browne of several books about the Neanderthals (*New York Times Book Review,* July 4, 1993, p. 1). The review includes the following



quotation from *The Neandertals* by Erik Trinkhaus and Pat Shipman. The authors are discussing a debate between two people called Stringer and Wolpoff, who are leading experts on the Neanderthals. "What is uncanny—and disheartening—is the way in which each side can muster the fossil record into seemingly convincing and yet utterly different syntheses of the course of human evolution. Reading their review papers side by side gives the reader a distinct feeling of having awakened in a Kafka novel." Assuming that this description of the use Stringer and Wolpoff make of their evidence is accurate, can it really be that their beliefs are adequately supported by this evidence? Will someone say that Stringer and Wolpoff are scientists and that scientists do not really *believe* the theories they put forward, but rather bear to them some more tentative sort of doxastic relation? "Regard as the best hypothesis currently available," or some such tentative attitude as that? Well, that is certainly not the way the author of the review sees the debate. Stringer, one of the parties in the debate, has written his own book, also discussed in the review, of which the reviewer says, "*In Search of the Neanderthals* is built around Mr. Stringer's underlying (and highly controversial) belief that the Neanderthals were an evolutionary dead end, that they simply faded away after a long and unsuccessful competition with their contemporaries, the direct ancestors of modern man." (That the Neanderthals were an evolutionary dead end is, by the way, the proposition that was at issue in the debate between Stringer and Wolpoff that was said to give the reader the feeling of having awakened in a novel by Kafka.) Later in the review, summarizing the book of another expert on human origins, the reviewer says, "In another section of the book, Mr. Schwartz defends his belief that modern human beings are more closely related to orangutans than to either chimpanzees or gorillas."

It is hard to see how to avoid the conclusion that it is very common for scientists qua scientists to have beliefs that are vehemently rejected by other equally intelligent scientists who possess the same scientific qualifications and the same evidence. Even in the more austere and abstract parts of science, even in high-energy physics, the current queen of the sciences, where there is some real plausibility in the thesis that investigators typically hold some more tentative attitude than belief toward the content of the controversial theories they champion, it is possible to find clear examples of this. To find them, one need only direct one's attention away from the *content* of the theories to the judgments that physicists make *about* the theories, their judgments about such matters as the usefulness of the theories, their "physical interest," and their prospects. A former colleague at Syracuse University, an internationally recognized quantum gravity theorist, has told me, using a simple declarative sentence that contained no hedges whatever, that superstring theory would come to nothing. Many prominent physicists (Sheldon Glashow, for example) agree. They really *believe* this. And many

prominent physicists (such as Steven Weinberg and Edward Witten) vehemently disagree. They really *believe* that superstring theory has provided the framework within which the development of fundamental physics will take place for a century.

But let us leave the sciences and return to our central examples, philosophy and politics. If we applied Clifford's Principle generally, we'd all have to become skeptics or agnostics as regards most philosophical and political questions—or we'd have to find some reasonable answer to the challenge, "In what sense can the evidence you have adduced support or justify your belief when there are many authorities as competent as you who regard this evidence as unconvincing?" But no answer to this challenge is evident, and religion seems to be the only area of human life in which very many people are willing to be agnostics about the answers to very many questions. (When I say "very many people," I mean very many people who write books. It is, of course, false that a very high proportion of the world population consists of people who are willing to be agnostics about religious questions.)

It might, however, be objected that what I have been representing as obvious considerations are obvious only on a certain conception of the nature of evidence. Perhaps the Difference Thesis is defensible because the evidence that some people have for their philosophical and political (and archaeological and historical . . . ) beliefs consists partly of the deliverances of that incommunicable "insight" that I speculated about earlier. This objection would seem to be consistent with everything said in "The Ethics of Belief," for Clifford nowhere tells his readers what evidence is. If "evidence" is evidence in the courtroom or laboratory sense (photographs, transcripts of sworn statements, the pronouncements of expert witnesses, records of meter readings—even arguments, provided that an argument is understood as simply a publicly available piece of text and that anyone who has read and understood the appropriate piece of text thereby "has" the evidence that the argument is said to constitute), then "the evidence" pretty clearly does not support our philosophical and political beliefs. Let such evidence be eked out with logical inference and private sense experience and the memory of sense experience (my private experience and my memories, as opposed to my testimony about my experience and memories, cannot be entered as evidence in a court of law or published in *Physical Review Letters*, but they can be part of *my* evidence for *my* beliefs—or so the epistemologists tell us) and it still seems to be true that "the evidence" does not support our philosophical and political beliefs. It is not that evidence in this sense is necessarily impotent: It can support—I hope—many life-and-death courtroom judgments and such scientific theses as that the continents are in motion. But it does not seem to be sufficient to justify most of our philosophical and political beliefs, or our philosophical and political beliefs



would certainly be far more uniform than they are. (Socrates told Euthyphro that people do not dispute about matters that can be settled by measurement or calculation. This is certainly false, but there is nevertheless an important grain of truth in it. There is indisputably significantly greater uniformity of opinion about matters that can be settled by measurement and calculation than there is about the nature of justice and the other matters that interested Socrates.) If "evidence" must be of the courtroom-and-laboratory sort, how can the Difference Thesis be defended?

If, however, "evidence" can include "insight" or some other incommunicable element—my private experience and my memories are not necessarily incommunicable—it may be that some of the philosophical and political beliefs of certain people are justified by the evidence available to them. (This, as I have said, is the view I find most attractive, or least unattractive.) But if evidence is understood in this way, how can anyone be confident that some of the religious beliefs of some people are not justified by the evidence available to them? (I say some people, and that is probably all that anyone would be willing to grant in the cases of philosophy and politics. Is there anyone who believes that it makes sense to talk of philosophical beliefs' being justified and who also thinks that the philosophical beliefs of both Carnap and Heidegger were justified? Is there anyone who holds the corresponding thesis about the political beliefs of both Henry Kissinger and the late Kim Il Sung?) If evidence can include incommunicable elements, how can anyone be confident that all religious believers are in violation of Clifford's Principle? If "evidence" can include the incommunicable, how can the Difference Thesis be defended?

What I have said so far amounts to a polemic against what I perceive as a widespread double standard in writings about the relation of religious belief to evidence and argument. This double standard consists in setting religious belief a test it could not possibly pass and in studiously ignoring the fact that very few of our beliefs on any subject could possibly pass this test.

Let me summarize this polemic by setting out some Socratic questions—a complex, in fact, of alternative lines of Socratic questioning laid out in a sort of flowchart.

Either you accept Clifford's Principle or not. If not, game ends. If so, either you think that religious belief stands convicted of some epistemic impropriety under Clifford's Principle or not. If not, game ends. If so, do you think that other important categories of belief stand convicted of similar epistemic impropriety under Clifford's Principle—preeminently philosophical and political belief? If you do, are you a skeptic as regards these categories of belief, a philosophical and political skeptic (and, in all probability, a skeptic in many other areas)? If not, why not? If you do think that the only important category of belief that stands convicted of epistemic impropriety under Clifford's Principle is religious belief—that is, if you accept the

Difference Thesis—how will you defend this position? Do you accept my disjunctive formulation of the Difference Thesis: "Either religious beliefs should be held to a stricter epistemic standard than beliefs of certain other types—of which philosophical and political beliefs are the paradigms—or if they are to be held to the same epistemic standard as other beliefs, they typically fare worse under this standard than typical beliefs of most other types, including philosophical and political beliefs"? If not, how would *you* formulate the Difference Thesis (and how would you defend the thesis you have formulated)? If you do accept my disjunctive formulation of the Difference Thesis, which of the disjuncts do you accept? And what is your defense of that disjunct? In formulating your defense, be sure to explain how you understand evidence. Does "evidence" consist entirely of objects that can be publicly examined (photographs and pointer readings) or that can, at least for purposes of setting out descriptions of the evidence available for a certain thesis, be adequately described in public language (sensations and memories, perhaps).

Or may what is called "evidence" be or be somehow contained in or accessible to the subject in the form of incommunicable states of mind of the kind I have rather vaguely called "insight"? If the former, and if you have chosen to say that a single standard of evidence is appropriate to both religious beliefs (on the one hand) and philosophical and political beliefs (on the other), and if you have decided that religious beliefs fare worse under this one standard than philosophical and political beliefs—well, how can you suppose that philosophical and political beliefs *are* supported by that sort of evidence, public evidence, to any significant degree? If the evidence available to you provides adequate support for, say, your adherence to a certain brand of functionalism, and if it is evidence of this straightforward public sort, then it is no doubt readily available to most philosophers who have paid the same careful attention to questions in the philosophy of mind that you have. But then why aren't most of these philosophers functionalists of your particular stripe? (Why, some respectable philosophers of mind aren't even functionalists at all, shocking as that may seem to some of us.) Wouldn't the possession and careful consideration of adequate, really *adequate*, evidence for a proposition induce belief in that proposition? Or if evidence that provided adequate support for a philosophical proposition were readily available throughout a sizable population of careful, qualified philosophers, wouldn't this fact at least induce a significant uniformity of opinion as regards that proposition among those philosophers?

If you take the other option as to the nature of evidence, if you grant that evidence may include incommunicable insight, can you be sure, have you any particular reason to suppose, that it is false that there are religious believers who have "insight" that lends the same sort of support to their religious beliefs that the incommunicable insight that justifies *your* disagreement with Kripke or Quine or Davidson or Dummett or Putnam lends to *your* beliefs?



This is the end of my Socratic flowchart. I will close with an attempt to forestall two possible misinterpretations. First, I have not challenged Clifford's Principle, or not unless to point out that most of us would find it awkward to live by a certain principle is to challenge it. Clifford's Principle could be correct as far as anything I have said goes. Secondly, I have not argued that religious beliefs—any religious beliefs of anyone's—*are* justified or enjoy any particular warrant or positive epistemic status or whatever your own favorite jargon is. (For that matter, I have not argued that philosophical and political beliefs—any philosophical or political beliefs of anyone's—are justified or enjoy any particular warrant or positive epistemic status. I have recorded my personal conviction that some philosophical and political beliefs are justified, but I have not *argued* for this conclusion. I do not mind—just for the sake of literary symmetry—recording my personal conviction that some religious beliefs are justified, but that they are is not a part my thesis.)

There is one important question that bears on the epistemic propriety of religious belief that I have not even touched on: whether some or all religious beliefs may go clean contrary to the available evidence—as many would say the belief in a loving and all-powerful deity goes clean contrary to the plain evidence of everyone's senses. To discuss this question was not my project. My project has been to raise certain points about the relevance of Clifford's Principle to the problem of the epistemic propriety of religious belief. These are different questions: It suffices to point out that the philosopher who argues that some religious belief—or some belief of any sort—should be rejected because it goes contrary to some body of evidence is not appealing to Clifford's Principle. If what I have said is correct, then philosophers who wish to mount some sort of evidential or epistemic attack on religious belief (or, more likely, not on religious belief in general but on particular religious beliefs) should set Clifford's Principle aside and argue that religious belief (or this or that religious belief) is refuted by the evidence they present.[3]

## Notes

1. W. K. Clifford, *Lectures and Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1879). Variously reprinted.

2. Shortly after this essay was written, Louis P. Pojman published the anthology *The Theory of Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1993), which contains "The Ethics of Belief." It should be noted that Pojman is a Christian philosopher who has written extensively on the epistemological problems of religious belief; his writings display an abiding interest in the issues raised in "The Ethics of Belief."

3. Versions of this paper were read at the 1993 Chapel Hill Philosophy Colloquium and to departmental colloquia and student groups at the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa, Tufts University, and the University of Miami (Coral Gables). I wish to thank those who were present on these occasions for their questions and comments, especially Simon Blackburn, Jarrett Leplin, William G. Lycan, H. Scott Hestevolt, George Smith, Daniel Dennett, Susan Haack, and Eddy Zemach. I also wish to thank David Lewis both for conversation and correspondence over many years that have had a profound influence on my ideas of the nature of philosophy, and for conversations on the specific topic of this paper.

# Chapter Three

# *The Possibility of Resurrection*

It has been said that the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead faces the following philosophical difficulty: There is no criterion that anyone could use to determine whether a given post-Resurrection man was Caesar or Socrates or anyone else who had long ago lived and died and returned to the dust. But the real philosophical problem facing the doctrine of the Resurrection does not seem to me to be that there is no criterion that the men of the new age could apply to determine whether someone then alive was the same man as some man who had died before the Last Day; the problem seems to me to be that there *is* such a criterion and (given certain facts about the present age) it would, of necessity, yield the result that many men who have died in our own lifetime and earlier will not be found among those who live *after* the Last Day.

Let us consider an analogy. Suppose a certain monastery claims to have in its possession a manuscript written in Saint Augustine's own hand. And suppose the monks of this monastery further claim that this manuscript was burned by Arians in the year 457. It would immediately occur to me to ask how *this* manuscript, the one I can touch, could be the very manuscript that was burned in 457. Suppose their answer to this question is that God miraculously recreated Augustine's manuscript in 458. I should respond to this answer as follows: The deed it describes seems quite impossible, even as an accomplishment of omnipotence. God certainly might have created a perfect duplicate of the original manuscript, but it would not be *that one*; its earliest moment of existence would have been after Augustine's death; it would never have known the impress of his hand; it would not have been a part of the furniture of the world when he was alive; and so on.

Now suppose our monks were to reply by simply asserting that the manuscript now in their possession *did* know the impress of Augustine's hand; that it *was* a part of the furniture of the world when the saint was alive;

that when God re-created or restored it, he (as an indispensable component of accomplishing this task) saw to it that the object he produced had all these properties.

I confess I should not know what to make of this. I should have to tell the monks that I did not see how what they believed could *possibly* be true. They might of course reply that their belief is a mystery, that God had *some* way of restoring the lost manuscript but that the procedure surpasses human understanding. Now I am sometimes willing to accept such answers; for example, in the case of the doctrine of the Trinity. But there are cases in which I would never accept such an answer. For example, if there were a religion that claimed that God had created two adjacent mountains without thereby bringing into existence an intermediate valley, I should regard any attempt to defend this doctrine as a "mystery" as so much whistle-talk. After all, I can hardly expect to be able to understand the Divine Nature, but I do understand mountains and valleys. And I understand manuscripts, too. I understand them sufficiently well to be quite confident that the monks' story is impossible. Still, I wish to be reasonable. I admit that one can be mistaken about conceptual truth and falsehood. I know from experience that a proposition that seems to force itself irresistibly upon the mind as a conceptual truth can turn out to be false. (If I had been alive in 1890, I should doubtless have regarded the Galilean law of the addition of velocities and the unrestricted comprehension principle in set theory as obvious conceptual truths.) Being reasonable, therefore, I am willing to listen to any *argument* the monks might have for the conclusion that what they believe is possible. Most arguments for the conclusion that a certain proposition is possibly true take the form of a story that (the arguer hopes) the person to whom the argument is addressed will accept as possible and which (the arguer attempts to show) entails the proposition whose modal status is in question.

Can such a story be told about the manuscript of Augustine? Suppose one of the monks is, in a very loose sense, an Aristotelian. He tells the following story (a version of a very popular tale): "Augustine's manuscript consisted of a certain parcel of matter upon which a certain form had been impressed. It ceased to exist when this parcel of matter was radically deformed. To re-create it, God needed only to collect the matter (in modern terms, the atoms) that once composed it and reimpress that form upon it (in modern terms, cause these atoms to stand to one another in the same spatial and chemical relationships they previously stood in)."

This story is defective. The manuscript God creates in the story is not the manuscript that was destroyed, since the various atoms that compose the tracings of ink on its surface occupy their present positions not as a result of Augustine's activity but of God's. Thus what we have is not a manuscript in Augustine's hand. (Strictly speaking, it is not even a *manuscript*.) (Compare the following conversation: "Is that the house of blocks your daughter built this morning?" "No, I built this one after I accidentally knocked hers down. I put all the blocks just where she did, though. Don't tell her.")



I think the philosophical problems that arise in connection with the burned manuscript of Saint Augustine are very like the problems that arise in connection with the doctrine of the Resurrection. If a man should be totally destroyed, then it is very hard to see how any man who comes into existence thereafter could be the *same* man. And I say this not because I have no criterion of identity I can employ in such cases but because I have a criterion of identity for men and it is, or *seems* to be, violated. And the popular quasi-Aristotelian story that is often supposed to establish the conceptual possibility of God's restoring to existence a man who has been totally destroyed does not lead me to think that I have got the wrong criterion or that I am misapplying the right one. The popular story, of course, is the story according to which God collects the atoms that once composed a certain man and restores them to the positions they occupied relative to one another when that man was alive; thereby (the storyteller contends) God restores the man himself. But this story, it seems to me, does not "work." The atoms of which I am composed occupy at each instant the positions they do because of the operations of certain processes within me (those processes that, taken collectively, constitute my being alive). Even when I become a corpse—provided I decay slowly and am not, say, cremated—the atoms that compose me will occupy the positions relative to one another that they do occupy *largely* because of the processes of life that *used* to go on within me: or this will be the case for at least some short period. Thus a former corpse in which the processes of life have been "started up again" may well be the very man who was once before alive, provided the processes of dissolution did not progress too far while he was a corpse. But if a man does not simply die but is totally destroyed (as in the case of cremation) then *he* can never be reconstituted, for the causal chain has been irrevocably broken. If God collects the atoms that used to constitute that man and "reassembles" them, they will occupy the positions relative to one another they occupy because of God's miracle and not because of the operation of the natural processes that, taken collectively, were the life of that man. (I should also be willing to defend the following theses: The thing such an action of God's would produce would not be a member of our species and would not speak a language or have memories of any sort, though, of course, he—or it—would *appear* to have these features.)

This much is analogous to the case of the burned manuscript. Possibly no one will find what I have said very convincing unless he thinks very much like me. Let me offer three arguments against an "Aristotelian" account of the Resurrection that have no analogues in the case of the manuscript and which will perhaps be more convincing to the generality of philosophers.

Arguments (a) and (b) are ad hominems, directed against Christians who might be inclined toward the "Aristotelian" theory. Argument (c) attempts to show that the "Aristotelian" theory has an impossible consequence.

A. The atoms of which I am composed cannot be destroyed by burning or the natural processes of decay, but they *can* be destroyed, as can atomic nuclei and even subatomic particles. (Or so it would seem: The principles for identity through time for subatomic particles are very hazy; physical theory has little if anything to say on the subject.) If, in order to raise a man on the Day of Judgment, God had to collect the "building blocks"—atoms, neutrons, or what have you—of which that man had once been composed, then a wicked man could hope to escape God's wrath by seeing to it that all his "building blocks" were destroyed. But according to Christian theology, such a hope is senseless. Thus, unless the nature of the ultimate constituents of matter is different from what it appears to be, the "Aristotelian" theory is inimical to a central point of Christian theology.
B. The atoms (or what have you) of which I am composed may very well have been parts of other people at some time in the past. Thus, if the "Aristotelian" theory is true, there could be a problem on the day of the Resurrection about *who* is resurrected. In fact, if that theory were true, a wicked man who had read his Aquinas might hope to escape punishment in the age to come by becoming a lifelong cannibal. But again, the possibility of such a hope cannot be admitted by any Christian.
C. It is possible that none of the atoms that are now parts of me were parts of me when I was ten years old. It is therefore possible that God could collect all the atoms that were parts of me when I was ten, without destroying me, and restore them to the positions they occupied relative to one another in 1952. If the "Aristotelian" theory were correct, this action would be sufficient for the creation of a boy who could truly say, "I am Peter van Inwagen." In fact, he and I could stand facing one another and each say truly to the other, "I am you." But this is conceptually impossible and therefore the "Aristotelian" theory is *not* correct.

No story other than our "Aristotelian" story about how it might be that a man who was totally destroyed could live again seems even superficially plausible. I conclude that my initial judgment is correct and that it is absolutely impossible, even as an accomplishment of God, that a man who has been burned to ashes or been eaten by worms should ever live again. What follows from this about the Christian hope of resurrection? Very little



of any interest, I think. All that follows is that if Christianity is true, then what I earlier called "certain facts about the present age" are *not* facts.

It is part of the Christian faith that all men who share in the sin of Adam must die. What does it mean to say that I must die? Just this: that one day I shall be composed entirely of nonliving matter; that is, I shall be a corpse. It is not part of the Christian faith that I must at any time be totally annihilated or disintegrate. (One might note that Christ, whose story is supposed to provide the archetype for the story of each man's resurrection, became a corpse but did not, even in his human nature, cease to exist.) It is of course true that men apparently cease to exist: those who are cremated, for example. But it contradicts nothing in the creeds to suppose that this is not what really happens, and that God preserves our corpses contrary to all appearance. Perhaps at the moment of each man's death, God removes his corpse and replaces it with a simulacrum, which is what is burned or rots. Or perhaps God is not quite so wholesale as this: Perhaps he removes for "safekeeping" only the "core person"—the brain and central nervous system—or even some special part of it. These are details.

I take it that this story shows that the Resurrection is a feat an almighty being could accomplish. I think this is the *only* way such a being could accomplish it. Perhaps I'm wrong, but that's of little importance. What *is* important is that God can accomplish it this way or some other. Of course one might wonder why God would go to such lengths to make it look as if most people not only die but pass into complete nothingness. This is a difficult question. I think it can be given a plausible answer, but not apart from a discussion of the nature of religious belief. I will say just this: If corpses inexplicably disappeared no matter how carefully they were guarded or inexplicably refused to decay and were miraculously resistant to the most persistent and ingenious attempts to destroy them, then we should be living in a world in which observable events that were *obviously* miraculous, *obviously* due to the intervention of a power beyond nature, happened with monotonous regularity. In such a world we should all believe in the supernatural: Its existence would be the best explanation for the observed phenomena. If Christianity is true, God wants us to believe in the supernatural. But experience shows us that if there is a God, he does not do what he very well *could* do: provide us with a ceaseless torrent of public, undeniable evidence of a power outside the natural order. And perhaps it is not hard to think of good reasons for such a policy.

## Postscript (1997)

If I were writing a paper on this topic today, I should not make the definite statement, "I think this is the *only* way such a being could accomplish it." My goal in "The Possibility of Resurrection" was to argue for the meta-

physical possibility of the Resurrection of the Dead. My method was to tell a story, a story I hoped my readers would grant was a metaphysically possible story, in which God accomplished the Resurrection of the Dead. But I was, I now think, too ready to identify the possibility of the Resurrection with the story I told to establish it. I am now inclined to think that there may well be other ways in which an omnipotent being could accomplish the Resurrection of the Dead than the way that was described in the story I told, ways I am unable even to form an idea of because I lack the conceptual resources to do so. An analogy would be this: A medieval philosopher, or even a nineteenth-century physicist, could have formed no idea of the mechanisms by which the sun shines, not because these mechanisms are a mystery that surpasses human understanding but simply because some of the concepts needed to describe them were not available before the twentieth century.

This analogy can be pressed a bit. Despite overwhelming evidence (provided by the fossil record) that there had been life on the earth for hundreds of millions of years, the great nineteenth-century physicist Lord Kelvin insisted that the sun had been shining for at most 20 million years. He maintained that the only conceivable mechanism of solar radiation was this: The sun is undergoing very gradual gravitational contraction, and solar radiation is due to the resulting gradual transformation of gravitational potential energy into radiant energy. When you plug the sun's mass, radius, and surface temperature into the appropriate equations (Kelvin contended), you will find that the sun cannot have been putting out radiant energy at anything like its current level for more than 20 million years. So (he concluded) the geologists and paleontologists—who are, after all, mere "stamp collectors" and not real *scientists*—have, demonstrably, drawn a false conclusion from their fossils and sedimentary layers.

Lord Kelvin's calculations were (I understand) correct: Given his premise about the mechanism of solar radiation, his conclusion follows. Twentieth-century nuclear physics, however, has supplied the real mechanism of solar radiation, and we now know that Kelvin's premise and conclusion were both wrong and that the conclusion the despised "stamp collectors" drew from the fossil record was right. Even in the nineteenth century, however, it would have been possible to show that Kelvin's premise and conclusion were not indisputable. Even within the confines of classical physics, it would have been possible to tell "just-so stories" according to which the sun has been shining for hundreds of millions of years. Here is the beginning of one: The sun is made up of rapidly spinning atoms; continual collisions between these atoms result in their kinetic energy of rotation being gradually transformed into radiant energy.

If one continues the story by specifying (for some particular moment in the past) the right average rotational kinetic energy for the solar atoms and the right average linear velocity and mean free path of the atoms between collisions and the right average loss of rotational kinetic energy in each collision, the resulting filled-out story will have the consequence that the sun has been producing light and heat at its present level for hundreds of millions of years—or for any period one likes.



This is, of course, a "just-so story": Although it serves to establish a possibility, it isn't *true*. In fact—as Kelvin would certainly have been quick to point out—it's a preposterous story, for no imaginable physical mechanism could have produced the initial conditions (the enormous rotational kinetic energy of the solar atoms) the story postulates. And yet, in a way, the story *is* true. There is one very abstract—and very important—feature that the sun-in-the-story shares with the real sun: Most of the energy that the sun gives off in the form of light and heat was not stored before it was radiated as gravitational potential energy, but rather was stored in the inner dynamics of the atoms of which the sun is composed (in the story, as kinetic energy of rotation; in the real world, as nuclear binding energy).

I am inclined now to think of the description that I gave in "The Possibility of Resurrection" of how an omnipotent being could accomplish the Resurrection of the Dead as a "just-so story": Although it serves to establish a possibility, it probably isn't true. (And it is easy to see why someone might think it was preposterous, although it might be questioned whether any of us is in an epistemic position to make a judgment of this sort.) But I am also inclined to think that even if the story is not true, even if it gets the "mechanism" of Resurrection wrong, it nevertheless *is* true—in a way. That is, I am inclined to think that even if the story is wrong about the specifics of the Resurrection, the Resurrection-in-the-story, like the sun-in-the-story, nevertheless shares some important but very abstract feature of the real thing. My inclination is to believe that God will somehow—in the way I have imagined or in some way I lack the conceptual resources to imagine, "in this way or some other"—preserve a remnant of each person, a *gumnos kókkos* (a naked kernel: 1 Cor. 15:37), which will be sown in corruption and raised in incorruption.

# Chapter Four

# *Dualism and Materialism: Athens and Jerusalem?*

Most Christians seem to have a picture of the afterlife that can without too much unfairness be described as "Platonic." When one dies, one's body decays, and what one *is*, what one has been all along, an immaterial soul or mind or self, continues to exist. One then faces judgment and is "sent" to heaven or to hell. Christians who are particularly well instructed (by current standards) will know that they are supposed to believe in something that doesn't fit this picture too well, something called the Resurrection of the Dead; if pressed, they will perhaps say that the burden of the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead is that eventually God will give everyone a body again—one of those mysterious and apparently pointless procedures for which God no doubt has some good reason that he has mercifully chosen not to bother us with (like Confirmation).

This picture of the afterlife obviously presupposes Platonic or Cartesian dualism. I want to explain why I find this doctrine unsatisfactory, both as a Christian and as a philosopher. (But as the title of this essay no doubt suggests, I'm going to have more to say about my religious difficulties with dualism. And my discussion of religious difficulties with dualism will be centered on the afterlife.)

## I

I shall begin by discussing in a very brief, partial, and sketchy way, some of my philosophical difficulties with "Platonic or Cartesian" dualism. Many philosophers of mind today would classify the dualism of Plato and Descartes as "substance dualism," a term that lives by its contrast to "property dualism." And property dualism is supposed to be the thesis that although human beings are (or may be) physical or material objects of some sort, they have *properties*, their mental properties, that are nonphysi-

cal. But what is a "nonphysical property"? The obvious definition would be this: A property is nonphysical if it entails the property of not being physical, if it is a property that cannot be had by anything physical. But it would follow from this definition that if mental properties are nonphysical properties, then anything that has mental properties is a nonphysical thing; the obvious definition, therefore, does not capture whatever it is that property dualists mean by 'nonphysical property'. While there is a good deal more to be said about this issue, I record my conviction that there is no way to make sense of 'nonphysical property' and hence no way to make sense of property dualism. When I talk of dualism, therefore, I mean substance dualism: the thesis that there are both physical and nonphysical substances, that you and I are and all other human persons are nonphysical substances, and that each human person bears some sort of intimate relation to a certain living human organism, the person's body.

In my book *Metaphysics*, I presented some arguments against dualism that seemed pretty good to me. Oddly enough, few dualists were persuaded by them. I am, for the most part, not going to repeat these arguments here. I will say only that when I enter most deeply into that which I call *myself*, I *seem* to discover that I am a living animal. And therefore dualism seems to me to be an unnecessarily complicated theory about my nature—unless there is some fact or phenomenon or aspect of the world that dualism deals with better than materialism does (or, equivalently, I should think, unless there is some good argument for dualism).

If there is any argument that shows that Platonic or Cartesian dualism is not an unnecessarily complicated view of our nature, it will presumably take the form of a demonstration that you and I have properties that are not (or could not reasonably be supposed to be) properties of any material object. Is there any such argument? Are there any such properties?

I will consider only one such property or set of properties: those associated with what Leibniz calls perception—or, let us say, sensuous experience; experiencing a particular shade of red or the taste of Vegemite or the sensation of toothache. I believe that Leibniz has shown—in his famous thought-experiment in the *Monadology*—that it is very hard indeed to see how a material thing could have "sensuous properties" like being in pain or "sensing redly." I should, in fact, be willing to make a statement that most of my fellow materialists will regard as treasonous: Leibniz's thought-experiment shows that when we carefully examine the idea of a material thing's having sensuous properties, it seems to be an impossible idea. If I am right about these things, do they provide me with a good reason for being a dualist? No—for the following argument-schema is invalid:

D or M.

Q.



It is very hard to see how it could be that Q if M.

*hence,*

That Q is a good reason for believing that D.

Here is a counterexample. Suppose we know that Bill is either the pope or the patriarch of Constantinople, but we don't know which. And suppose we know that (for reasons that are hidden from us) he attends services at a Christian Reformed church every Sunday. It would be a mistake for us to reason as follows:

Bill is either the pope or the patriarch of Constantinople.

Bill attends services at a Christian Reformed church every Sunday.

It is very hard to see how it could be that Bill attends services at a Christian Reformed church every Sunday if he is the patriarch of Constantinople.

*hence,*

That Bill attends services at a Christian Reformed church every Sunday is a good reason for believing that he is the pope.

It may be that there is a valid argument-schema in, so to speak, the general vicinity of this invalid argument-schema. The schema that is got by replacing the third premise-schema with

It is significantly easier to see how it could be that Q if D than it is to see how it could be that Q if M.

seems quite plausible. But the following instance of this schema is, I think, false:

It is significantly easier to see how it could be that we have sensuous experience if we are immaterial things than it is to see how it could be that we have sensuous experience if we are material things.

Any inclination that anyone may have to believe that this statement is true is, in my view, an illusion that is due to the fact that it is much harder for us to represent immaterial things in our thought than material things; for that reason, it is much harder to carry out the analogue of Leibniz's thought-experiment for immaterial things. But, if one perseveres through this difficulty—or so it has seemed to me when I have tried it—one will find that it is just as difficult to imagine an immaterial thing having sensuous experiences as it is to imagine a material thing having sensuous experiences

(more difficult, in fact; but only because it is not very easy to imagine an immaterial thing at all). The hard fact of the matter is, sensuous experience is a great philosophical mystery. Like the passage of time and self-reference and vagueness, it's just something we don't have a very good philosophical handle on. It is a mystery how a material thing could have sensuous properties simply and solely because it is a mystery how *anything* could.

## II

Let us now turn from philosophical to theological considerations. What can be said about the question whether the Christian (qua Christian) is in any sense committed to dualism? The relevant considerations would seem to be what is found in the following texts, which I list in order of ascending importance:

- the writings of venerable but nonauthoritative authors (particularly the Fathers of the Church);
- the three great first-millennial Creeds;
- Holy Scripture.

Let us take these in turn.

When we consider the Fathers, it is incontestable that dualism triumphs. Almost without exception, the Fathers were dualists. I am not happy about setting myself against such a cloud of witnesses. Nevertheless, I believe that the anthropology of the Fathers is the result of an unfortunate marriage of Athens and Jerusalem, and although I follow the Fathers on most matters about which they mostly agree, I am not going to follow them on this one.

I pass with relief to the Creeds. Here there is no trace of the "Platonic" picture of the afterlife. For the record, here is what the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed have to say about our post mortem existence:

- "I believe in . . . the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting."
- "I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come."
- "At whose [Christ's] coming all men shall rise again with their bodies and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil into everlasting fire."

What is most worthy of note about these passages for our purposes is what they do not say. What they do not say is that in the interval between a



person's death and resurrection, a person exists as a separated soul. Indeed, they have nothing whatever to say about that interval. The friends of dualism may answer that nothing in the Creeds implies that we shall *not* exist as separated souls between our death and the general resurrection. I agree. It is a quite plausible thesis that everyone responsible for the wording of the two later Creeds was a dualist and that nothing about the state of the soul between death and resurrection was put into those two Creeds because every Christian in the fourth and fifth centuries—Catholic, heretic, or schismatic—was a dualist. (Thou hast conquered, Athenian!) I contend only that there is nothing in the passages I have quoted to make the antidualist uncomfortable.[1]

Let us now turn to the Bible. I shall look first at the Old Testament and then at the New. There is little to support dualism in the Old Testament and much that the materialist will find congenial. God, we are told,

> . . . formed man [*adham*] of dust from the ground [*adhamah*], and then breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being. (Gen. 2:7)

Later, when God's curse is pronounced upon *adham* and *adhamah*, God says,

> In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return. (Gen. 3:19)

This Ash Wednesday theme, so to call it, the theme of humanity as dust, is, of course, a common one in the Old Testament: ". . . shall the dust praise thee?"; ". . . they that go down into the dust. . . ." The attempts I know of to give a Platonic gloss to this theme seem to me to be singularly unconvincing. Consider, for example, Longfellow's verse from "A Psalm of Life" (and I don't think that any major philosopher or theologian has done a better job of Platonizing the dust of Genesis than the minor poet has):

> Life is real! Life is earnest!
> And the grave is not its goal;
> Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
> Was not spoken of the soul.

Indeed it wasn't. But it *was* spoken of the living human beings Adam and Eve.

Dust is still present in the first biblical intimation of resurrection (I would not count Ezekiel's vision of the Valley of the Dry Bones as an intimation of resurrection), in Daniel 12:2:

> And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

I suppose I should say something about Saul and the Witch of Endor and the summoning of Samuel from the dead. But I really don't know what to say about this story. When I read it, I have only questions. Does the Christian dualist think that this story supports dualism? Can the Christian who believes that we exist in a disembodied state after death believe that there are necromancers, people who have the power to summon the disembodied dead and cause them somehow to assume a visible form? Is this not a difficult story for all Christians who take the Bible seriously? I'd like to hear what some others think about this story.

## III

Let us now turn to the New Testament. I shall discuss both what I consider to be the general tendency of the New Testament and two passages that are sometime used as "proof texts" by dualists.

The New Testament is not a textbook of metaphysics. Nevertheless, the books of the New Testament—unlike the books of the Old—were composed in a world in which metaphysics was very much in the air, and there are passages that reflect this. It was the Greek proclivity to metaphysical speculation, I suppose, that was responsible for the celebrated and difficult passage in 1 Corinthians 15 on, as we might say, the *specifics* of the Resurrection of the Dead: "But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' You foolish man!" Paul's exasperation is evident, but he does not shirk the question, and, it seems to me, his answer provides the single passage in the New Testament that is directly addressed to philosophical worries about resurrection. Let us look at what Paul says, and let us not be bound by the conventions of New Testament translation, which make use of terms that are for us associated with all sorts of ideas that were not present in Paul's mind—or at least I should like to see some argument before I grant that they were:

> What you sow will not be made alive unless it die, and what you sow is not the *soma* that will be, but a naked kernel [*kókkos*], as it may be of wheat or of some other kind; but God gives it a *soma* as he wished, to each seed [*sperma*] its own *soma*. Not all flesh is the same, for human beings have one flesh, and beasts another flesh, and birds another, and fish another still. . . . So also the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is sown in corruption and raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a psychic *soma*, it is raised a pneumatic *soma*. If there is a psychic *soma*, there is also a pneumatic *soma*. So also it is written: the first human being, Adam, became a living *psuchè*. The final Adam became a life-giving *pneûma*. (1 Cor. 15:36–45)

What is the "naked kernel" of which Paul speaks? The Christian Platonist will reply, "The soul, of course." But we should note that Paul does not think that the kernel of wheat that is planted in the ground is an immaterial *psuchè*. Indeed, Paul applies this word—and the corresponding adjective, which I have somewhat perversely represented by the English word 'psychic'—only to that which is sown and dies, not to that which is raised. I do not think it strains the text to say that Paul used the word '*psuchè*' to mean "a human being alive with old life that comes to us from Adam." (If Paul had wanted to talk of the "soul" in anything like the Platonic sense, we may wonder why he would use the only word available for expressing that sense with an entirely different meaning.) I would contend, similarly, that Paul used the adjective I have represented by the word 'psychic' to mean "alive with the old Adamic life" and that he used the word '*pneûma*' ("spirit") to mean "a human being who is alive with the new resurrection life" (and so, similarly, for the adjective I have represented by the word 'pneumatic').



A note on the word '*soma*'. I have no real objection to translating '*soma*' as 'body', so long as we do not understand the English word in what I may call its "strict, Cartesian sense." An example will illustrate what I mean. A present-day analytical philosopher, writing about the implications of keeping Alice's brain alive in a vat, may well speak of Alice, during her brain's time in the vat, as "not having a body," and may well go on to discuss the consequences of inserting her brain "into a new body." But a Cartesian will tell this philosopher that, strictly speaking, the brain in the vat *is* Alice's body and that the projected surgery, strictly speaking, will not *supply* Alice with a body but will rather transform the rather minimal body she has in the vat into a body of normal size, shape, and capacities. (And one would not have to be a Cartesian to agree that, strictly speaking, this is how we should talk. Even the materialist may agree on reflection that this is how we should use the word 'body' if we are being careful.)

Now suppose we convince a Cartesian that my interpretation of Paul is correct: that the "naked kernel" that is sown when Priscilla dies is not something immaterial but something that stands to the raised Priscilla as the seed stands to the new wheat. This Cartesian will say that if Paul is right, then Priscilla will never, even in death, lack a body—not strictly speaking. Rather, between her death and her resurrection, she will have a naked kernel (whatever exactly that may turn out to be) for a body. But this "strict, Cartesian" use of 'body', however defensible it may be on abstract, philosophical grounds, is not the same as Paul's use of '*soma*'. Paul's use of '*soma*' is much more like that of my analytical philosopher who writes about a brain's "getting a new body." For Paul, the *soma*-that-will-be is the living flesh with which God will clothe the naked kernel, as he clothed the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision—but flesh that is alive with the new life that he has given to us in Christ and not with the old life that he breathed into the dust of which Adam was made.[2] In a sense, then, flesh and blood will inherit the Kingdom of God. But not *this* flesh and not *this* blood, which are perishable, but the imperishable flesh and blood that God will give us when

we come to the wedding feast. (Some of us, having refused the new life, will have nothing to put on but flesh that is alive with the old life, but God will give everyone one flesh or the other.)[3]

I do not have the space, or the learning, to consider everything Paul says about resurrection. I do, however, have a question for the Christian dualist about the Pauline representation of death and resurrection. If, between one's death and one's resurrection, one exists as a disembodied Platonic soul, why does Paul repeatedly refer to death as a sleep? I by no means contend that the Christian dualist cannot come up with a satisfactory answer to this question, but I do think that the dualist's answer, or answers, should be explicitly set out for examination.

I wish now to look at several passages (passages I regard as typical—I am still on the topic of general tendencies in the New Testament) in which Jesus is represented as using the word '*psuchè*'. Again, I will lay aside the conventions of New Testament translation.

> For whoever wishes to save his *psuchè* will lose it, but whoever loses his *psuchè* for my sake shall find it. For what will someone be profited if he gains the whole world and forfeits his *psuchè*? Or what will anyone give in exchange for his *psuchè*? (Matt. 16:25, 26. Cf. Mark 8:36, 37.[4])

(One of the conventions of New Testament translation is to translate the first two occurrences of *psuchè* in this passage as 'life' and the second two as 'soul'.)

> Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever has found his *psuchè* shall lose it, and whoever has lost his *psuchè* for my sake shall find it. (Matt. 10:38, 39. Cf. Mark 8:35; Luke 17:33)

It seems to me obvious that in these passages '*psuchè*' should be translated simply as 'life'.

There is a passage (also in Matthew) that uses the word '*psuchè*' in a way that suggests a Platonic view of the afterlife; although I speak under correction, I believe that it is the only passage in the New Testament of which this can be said:

> Do not fear those who can kill the *soma* but not the *psuchè*; fear rather him who is able to destroy both the *psuchè* and the *soma* in Gehenna. (10:28)

This is what some would call "Q" material; it is worth looking at the corresponding passage in Luke:

> . . . [D]o not fear those who kill the *soma* and after that have nothing more that they can do; fear him who after he has killed has authority to cast into Gehenna. (12:4, 5)

I regard the Lucan passage as representing more accurately the dominical saying that underlies both passages. I would suggest that Luke's wording reflects an understanding of what is suggested by the Greek opposition of '*psuchè*' and '*soma*' that is superior to that of the author of Matthew. (Perhaps Luke cannot think of a good word to use as the direct object of 'cast' and for that reason uses the verb intransitively.)



I now turn now from the general to the particular, to the two "proof texts" I have promised to discuss. (By a 'proof text' I mean a biblical passage that is regarded by someone or other as a "clincher," a passage that simply *settles* some theological question. Various people with whom I have discussed the Christian view of the afterlife have cited these two passages to demonstrate that the Bible teaches that the unresurrected dead think and speak and are aware. And, they argue, if the unresurrected dead think and speak and are aware, that implies dualism.) Both of the passages are from Luke (they have no parallels in the other Gospels), and both turn on dominical utterances.

The first is the parable of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31). The argument for the conclusion that this parable represents the unresurrected dead as conscious and capable of thought and action is this: The rich man in hell *(hades)* and Abraham converse in the present tense (across a "great gulf") about the rich man's still living brothers; the rich man begs Abraham to send a messenger to them to warn them of what is in store for them if they do not alter their lives. Abraham tells him that this would do no good, but he does not dispute the rich man's assumption that at the very moment they are speaking, his brothers are alive and sinning away.

Let us first note that this is a parable. I believe that the way to approach a parable is to ask what its central lesson is and to draw from the parable no conclusions that are not closely related to that central lesson. We should not, for example, conclude from the parable of the thief in the night that God is liable to make off with our property when we least expect it, or from the parable of the unjust judge that the purpose of prayer is to annoy God till, just to shut us up, he tends to our needs. Here is a more substantive example: I would not draw from the parable of Dives and Lazarus the conclusion that the damned can desire the salvation of others (a conclusion that is not, I suppose, heretical but is not what Christians have generally believed either). I would not draw this conclusion because I do not think that the parable is addressed to the question whether the damned can have altruistic concerns. The central lesson of the parable (or rather the central lesson of the part of it I have summarized; the parable is complex and makes several points) is that supernatural manifestations have no power to produce real changes in the lives of the wicked, of those who flout Moses and the prophets without the smallest pang of compunction. Jesus' resurrection itself—an allusion to that event is pretty clearly intended—will not, considered simply as a display of God's power, convert anyone who does not recognize the claims of the Law. I do not think that this parable licenses any theological conclusions that are not closely related to this lesson. And, I

would argue, questions about the metaphysics of the afterlife are *not* closely—or even distantly—related to this lesson. (I want to stress the point that I am speaking only about how I think we should approach *parables*, pithy little stories told by a character in the biblical narrative to illustrate or illumine an abstract point by means of concrete imagery, stories told as recognized fiction; what I say is not addressed to any more general hermeneutical question.)

If you disagree, let me ask you a question. Suppose, safe on Canaan's side, you were to discover that you had been, well, just *dead* for a thousand years. Would you ask Jesus how he could have so misled you, in the parable of Dives and Lazarus, about the possibility of communication between the living and the recently dead?

The second text we shall consider is the story of the good thief (Luke 23:42, 43). The argument for the conclusion that the unresurrected dead are aware of their condition is, of course, an obvious inference from Jesus' words, "Truly I tell you, today you shall be with me in Paradise."[5]

This utterance of Jesus does not occur in a parable, and what I have said in response to the previous "proof text" does not, therefore, apply to it. Neither, however, does it occur within a discourse on the nature of the afterlife. The words of Jesus are, obviously, supposed to be what the Book of Common Prayer calls "comfortable words." Let me ask a question in somewhat the same spirit as the question I asked a moment ago. Imagine that the good thief dies in agony; "the next thing he knows," as the idiom has it, he is in Paradise. He presently discovers that over 3,000 years have passed since he died. Was he deceived? Was it somehow wrong of Jesus to say to him, "Today you shall be with me in Paradise"? If so, what should Jesus have said? Should he have said, "After the general resurrection, which will occur after an indefinite period that only the Father knows, you shall be with me in Paradise—but it will seem to you as if no time has passed"? Are there not circumstances in which taking extreme care to frame one's statements in words that express only the strict and literal truth is unsatisfactory from a pastoral point of view? And are there not, in fact, circumstances in which taking extreme care to frame one's statements in words that express only the strict and literal truth can impede communication? (I know that a certain large structure in Manhattan is a terminal and not a station; nevertheless, I don't generally call it Grand Central Terminal, because that's not what most people call it. And from my calling it Grand Central Station you cannot infer that I believe that it's a station rather than a terminal.) In any case, to suppose that Jesus and the good thief would have attached much importance to the distinction between the strict and the lax interpretations of Jesus' words—the strict being the one insisted on by those who are treating these words as proof text, and the lax being the one I'm pushing—seems to me to attribute an analytical cast of mind to



two first-century Jews (in their extreme agony, let us remember) that is probably unwarranted.

Those who regard the two Lucan texts I have considered as proof texts will no doubt tell me that I am presenting a rather unedifying spectacle: twisting and turning, impaled on intransigent texts, flailing about, searching in vain for some way off the scriptural mount I am fixed on. Well, I have to admit that I wish these texts were not worded quite as they are. But I have questions I can ask them in return. Can they do any better with the dust of Genesis? With Paul's repeated representation of death as "sleep"? I do not regard *these* texts as proof texts—although I can't resist the temptation to point out that if I did, my proof texts would be much more numerous, uniform, and straightforward than theirs.

Drawing theological conclusions from Scripture is a complicated matter, just as drawing scientific conclusions from nature is a complicated matter. In fact one can hardly ever *draw* conclusions from either—not, at any rate, highly abstract and theoretical conclusions. What one should do if one's interests are highly abstract and theoretical is to formulate abstract and theoretical positions (theological or scientific, as the case may be) and to see what sense they make of the data (the words of Scripture or the phenomena of nature). I think that, all in all, what the Bible says about death and resurrection makes more sense if we assume that death is but a sleep. I regard the two proof texts I have examined as recalcitrant data. (It is, of course, quite common in science for the best available theories to confront various recalcitrant data.)

There is one New Testament datum that Platonic dualism does rather poorly with that I have not yet mentioned: The New Testament treats death as something horrible. In a famous essay,[6] Oscar Cullmann has eloquently contrasted the death of Socrates and the death of Jesus. We are so familiar with both stories that the contrast between them may escape our notice till someone points it out to us. Although it is true that the judicial murder of Jesus was considerably more brutal than the judicial murder of Socrates, I do not see how we can possibly attribute the striking contrast between the agony in Gethsemane and the calm, measured discourse of Socrates in *Crito* and *Phaedo* to that fact alone.[7] In my view, in the death of Jesus we see a man facing death who understood death (we see an absolutely perfect man facing death *on his own*, without the illusions about death that comforted Socrates and without the presence of the Holy Spirit, who comforts Christian martyrs). Socrates' illusion was this: that it was not *he* who would die but simply an adjunct, his body—a thing that was not only not himself but a prison, a coil to be shuffled off with relief. Jesus, however, knew that it was he himself, and not another thing, who would die, who would become a corpse, who would be composed of nonliving matter. Therein lies the suffocating horror of death. At least this seems very real to

me. When I think of the fact that I shall one day be composed of dead flesh, it is then that I appreciate the full power of the words of the medieval song: *Timor mortis conturbat me* ("The fear of death torments me"). This is, by the by, a very different experience from fearing nonexistence. It may be that the anticipation of endless nonexistence is frightening, but I find the anticipation of being even temporarily composed of dead flesh frightening. I am, after all, an animal, and this prospect is the prospect of a total violation of my animal nature.[8]

## IV

An important philosophical argument for dualism remains to be addressed, an argument that, unlike the argument we examined in section I, proceeds from Christian premises. This argument perhaps represents the primary philosophical reason that most Christian dualists would adduce for their position. In a nutshell, it is this: The doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead presupposes dualism. For if I am not something immaterial, if I am a living animal, then death must be the end of me. If I am a living animal, then I am a material object. If I am a material object, then I am the mereological sum of certain atoms. But if I am the mereological sum of certain atoms today, it is clear from what we know about the metabolisms of living things that I was not the sum of those same atoms a year ago. Plainly I must have been the mereological sum of a different set of atoms a year ago—one that hardly overlaps the set of atoms whose mereological sum I am today.[9] And the fact that the atoms of which I am composed are in continuous flux is a stumbling block for the materialist who believes in resurrection.

Suppose that a thousand years from now it is Time, and God brings the present order of things to an end and inaugurates the new age. But how shall even omnipotence bring *me* back—me, whose former atoms are now spread pretty evenly throughout the biosphere? This question does not confront the dualist, who will say that there is no need to bring me back because I have never left. But what shall the materialist say? From the point of view of the materialist, it looks as if asking God to bring me back is like asking him to bring back the snows of yesteryear or the light of other days. For what can even omnipotence do but *reassemble*? What else is there *to* do? And reassembly is not enough, for I have been composed of different atoms at different times. If someone says, "If, in a thousand years, God reassembles the atoms that are going to compose you at the moment of your death, those reassembled atoms will compose you," there is an obvious objection to this thesis. If God can, a thousand years from now, reassemble the atoms that are going to compose me at the moment of my death—and no doubt he can—he can also reassemble the atoms that compose me right now. In fact, if there is no overlap between the two sets of atoms, he could



do both and set the two resulting persons side by side. And which would be I? Neither or both, it would seem, and, since not both, neither.

"God wouldn't do that." I daresay he wouldn't. But if he were to reassemble either set of atoms, the resulting man would be who he was, and it is absurd, it is utterly incoherent, to suppose that his identity could depend on what might happen to some atoms other than the atoms that compose him. In the end, there would seem to be no way round the following requirement: If I am a material thing, then if a man who lives at some time in the future is to be *I*, there will have to be some sort of material and causal continuity between this matter that composes me now and the matter that will then compose that man. But this requirement looks very much like what Paul gives us in his description of the resurrection: When I die, the power of God will somehow preserve something of my present being, a *gumnos kókkos*, which will continue to exist throughout the interval between my death and my resurrection and will, at the general resurrection, be clothed in a festal garment of new flesh.

## V

I have asked the question, What can be said about whether a Christian is committed to dualism? I think that the answer must be that the Christian is not committed to dualism—not simply in virtue of being a Christian. I would not want to defend any stronger thesis than the following: It is permissible for a Christian to believe, it is a possible point of view for a Christian to adopt, that dualism represents a false picture of human nature (a picture that became a part of the worldview of most Christians because Greek metaphysics pervaded the culture in which the young Church developed). Indeed, it seems to me to be ludicrous to suppose that any stronger thesis than this could be right. However good the arguments against dualism may seem to *me* to be, I have to admit that God has allowed dualism to become the dominant view of human nature among Christians. An essential part of my own contrary view of human nature and the afterlife—that "death is but a sleep"—was condemned at Trent, but no ecumenical council or denominational synod or inquisitorial office or faculty of theology, no pope or archbishop or reformer, has, to my knowledge, condemned dualism per se (I believe that some *forms* of dualism have been condemned by Rome). Since God has allowed dualism to dominate Christian anthropology for two millennia, I can only conclude that if dualism represents, as I believe, a false view of our nature, this view is not perniciously false: A widespread acceptance of dualism does not distort or impoverish the Gospel. (I must make an important distinction. I do believe that there is an inherent *tendency* in dualism to distort some aspects of the Gospel. But I should be foolish indeed if I argued that the same was not true of the thesis

that we are breathing dust and death is a sleep. It is not an unfamiliar situation in theology for all of the possible answers to a certain question to be dangerous. Christian theology is almost by definition a dangerous enterprise.) What I would have you believe is that dualism and materialism are like the various incompatible theories of Atonement. What one believes about dualism and materialism is a matter of Christian liberty: Christians may, in fear and trembling, make up their own minds about whether to be dualists or materialists—or if they are able (but this ability is a gift not often given to philosophers and theologians) simply to accept the scriptural statement that we are made in God's image and likeness and simply to accept the Gospel promise of eternal life and not to concern themselves with metaphysical questions about human nature and eternal life.[10]

## Notes

1. The friends of dualism may also want to point out that although the soul is not mentioned in creedal statements about eschatology, the soul is mentioned in the part of the Athanasian Creed devoted to the human nature of Christ:

> . . . and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul [*anima rationabilis*] and human flesh subsisting.

The human soul also figures in an analogy that is supposed to clarify the nature of the union of the divine and human natures in Christ:

> . . . for as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ.

But it is not clear to me that the phrases 'of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting' and 'as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man' must be understood as a Christian Platonist would understand them; it seems to me that an Aristotelian interpretation is also possible. We should remember that Augustine (whose spirit is present throughout the Athanasian Creed) attempted to illumine the nature of the Trinity by comparing the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit with the psychological operations of intellect, understanding, and will. But no one would take this as evidence that Augustine believed that Socrates' intellect, Socrates' understanding, and Socrates' will were in any sense three separate (or separable) existences.

2. Cf. 2 Cor. 5.

3. I would agree with Augustine [*The City of God*, XIII, 20] that when Paul says that we shall receive a "pneumatic *soma*" or "spiritual body," he does not mean that the visible, tangible flesh we have now will be transformed into or replaced by invisible, intangible flesh; he means, rather, that we shall be given visible, tangible flesh that is perfectly subject to spirit, to the intellect and will that have been perfected in Christ. (When Paul has a spiritual body, he will no longer have to say, "I see in my members a different law. . . .") Augustine offers an analogy: Just as we call a spirit "carnal" when it is subject to the flesh, so we may call a body "spiritual" when it is subject to the spirit.



4. The wording of the parallel passage in Luke (9:24) is worth taking note of: "For what will someone be profited if he gains the whole world but loses or forfeits *himself*."

5. As far as purely grammatical considerations go, it would not be impossible to translate this as "Truly I tell you today, you shall be with me in paradise"; I have to admit, however, that it does not seem at all likely that this was the meaning Luke intended.

6. "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?" in Krister Stendahl, ed., *Immortality and Resurrection* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 9–54.

7. The suggestion of Harry A. Wolfson ("Immortality and Resurrection in the Philosophy of the Church Fathers," in Stendahl, *Immortality and Resurrection*) that the agony of Jesus is to be attributed to Jesus' awareness that he was a sinner who must face judgment simply has no basis whatever in the text of the New Testament.

8. I of course believe, as a Christian, that death is a defeated enemy. Well, Hitler's Germany was a defeated enemy in 1944: Its final destruction was then inevitable and assured. But it was still frightening and it still had terrible things to do.

9. I am assuming various metaphysical theses here—that it is possible for one and the same thing to be the mereological sum of different things at different times; that it is *not* possible for any things to have more than one mereological sum at a given time; that human beings like me can strictly and literally endure through time; and many others. There are a lot of such assumptions. I could write a book.

10. When I presented this paper at the Notre Dame conference on the philosophy of mind for which it was written, Dean Zimmerman was the commentator. I wish to thank him for his thought-provoking and insightful comments. I also read the paper at a Pacific regional meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers. I thank the members of the audiences on both occasions—and particularly William Hasker and Daniel Howard-Snyder—for their questions and comments.

# Chapter Five

# *Probability and Evil*

## I

In this essay, I will discuss the question whether the evils of the world—the vast amounts of suffering it contains—render the existence of an omnipotent and morally perfect God "improbable." Many philosophers have argued that although the existence of such a God may be logically consistent with these vast amounts of suffering, the existence of this being is nevertheless improbable—very improbable indeed—on the evidence provided by the suffering of human beings and animals. This essay is an attempt to do more clearly and precisely what I did in an essay called "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence."[1] Although the present essay is logically self-contained, it is intended primarily for an audience familiar with the earlier paper.

What sort of probability is it that figures in the thesis that the evils of the world render the existence of God improbable? Most of the philosophers who have argued for this thesis would, I think, say that the relevant notion of probability was "epistemic probability." But how is this notion to be spelled out? Paul Draper has proposed that we understand the notion of the epistemic probability of a proposition in terms of the "degree of belief" that a fully rational person would have in that proposition in a given "epistemic situation,"[2] and this proposal would seem to be fairly standard. At any rate, it represents the line of thinking about epistemic probability that I will pursue. But in attempting to understand Draper's proposal, I face a difficulty right at the outset: I do not understand the notion of "degrees of belief." It seems evident to me that to believe that $p$ is to accept the proposition that $p$, and that acceptance of a proposition is not a matter of degree: One either accepts a given proposition or one does not accept it (which, of course is not the same thing as accepting its denial).[3] But if I do not understand the notion of degrees of belief, I understand one of the explanations that philosophers have provided for this notion, and I can let the *explanans* serve as a substitute for the *explanandum*. That is, I shall use the *explanans* that certain philoso-

phers have provided for 'degrees of belief' to define 'epistemic probability' without reference to the dubious notion of degrees of belief.

Philosophers of probability have sometimes attempted to explain the concept "degree of belief" in behavioral terms: in terms of the odds that the person to whom degrees of belief are being ascribed would be willing to give on a bet. This idea may be formulated by reference to the bets of an "ideal bookmaker." If I am an ideal bookmaker, then: I accept bets at my discretion; I'm interested only in maximizing my winnings (I have no other interest in money); I need fear no losing streak, however long, for I can borrow any amount at no interest for any period; I am in a situation in which it is possible to settle any bet objectively; my "clients" always pay when they lose, and they never have "inside information"—that is, information not available to *me*—about the matter being betted on; and so on (add such further clauses as you deem necessary). Suppose also that there is only one way for an "ideal bookmaker" to accept a bet: People come to him and say things of the form, "I'll bet you $k$ dollars that $p$. Will you give me odds of $m$ to $n$?" ("I'll bet you ten dollars that the sun will not rise tomorrow. Will you give me odds of 10 to 1?" This is equivalent to: "Will you agree to pay me 100 dollars if the sun does not rise tomorrow, provided that I agree to pay you ten dollars if it does?") When a bet is offered in this form, an "ideal bookmaker" must either take it or leave it: No negotiation about the odds or anything else is allowed. (An ideal bookmaker never declines a bet because of the amount the bettor puts on the table: No bet is too small, and—because of his enviable credit situation—no bet is too large.)

Now that we have the concept of an ideal bookmaker, we may define the notion of epistemic probability—"directly," as it were, without reference to the idea of degrees of belief. Before stating the definition, I will give an example that illustrates the intuitions that underlie the definition. Suppose a fair die is to be thrown. What is the "epistemic probability" (relative to my present epistemic situation) of its falling 2, 3, 5, or 6? The following thought-experiment suggests a way to approach this question. I imagine that I am an ideal bookie, and I say to myself, "Suppose someone said to me, 'I'll bet you twenty dollars [or whatever; the amount is irrelevant] that the die will fall 2, 3, 5, or 6.' What odds should I be willing to give him (assuming that I am fully rational)?" If there is nothing very unusual about my present epistemic situation, the answer is obvious: I should be willing to give him any odds lower than 1 to 2. (I should, for example, accept the bet if he proposed odds of 9 to 20: I should be willing to pay him nine dollars if the die fell 2, 3, 5, or 6, provided that he agreed to pay me twenty dollars—the amount of his bet—if it fell 1 or 4.) I therefore—it seems evident—manifest in my behavior a belief that "it's 2 to 1 that" the die will fall the way he has bet; that is, I must regard the probability of the die's falling 2, 3, 5, or 6 as equal to 2/3. And this value—it seems evident—should be the "epistemic probability" of the die's so falling for someone in my epistemic situation. The intuitions behind these judgments may be generalized and the generalization treated as a definition:



The epistemic probability of $p$ relative to (the epistemic situation) K $=_{df}$

(1) 0 if a fully rational ideal bookmaker in K would be willing to give any odds to a client who bet that $p$;

(2) 1 if a fully rational ideal bookmaker in K would be willing to give any odds to a client who bet that not-$p$;

(3) $n/(m+n)$ otherwise, where $m$ and $n$ are determined as follows: $m$ to $n$ are the highest odds that have the following property: A fully rational ideal bookmaker in K would be willing to give a client who bet that $p$ any odds lower than those odds.

This definition immediately suggests a question. What is it that *makes* it rational or irrational (in a given set of circumstances) to be willing to accept a bet that $p$ at the odds $m$ to $n$? Well, let us look at an example. Consider again the case in which someone wants to bet me that a die will fall 2, 3, 5, or 6. I said that in such a case, at least if I am an ideal bookmaker, it would be rational for me to take the bet at any odds less than 1 to 2 (and at no higher odds). Let us ask a simple, obvious question. *Why*, exactly, would that be the rational determination of the odds I should accept? Only one answer seems plausible: Because I judge that it is rational for me to accept the thesis that the *real, objective* probability of the die's falling 2, 3, 5, or 6 is $\frac{2}{3}$. If I did not make that judgment (perhaps because I had reason to believe that the die was biased), I should not take the bet at all or I should figure the odds differently. In my view, this answer may be generalized: Epistemic probabilities exist only in cases in which it is possible to make reasonable judgments about certain real, objective probabilities. (I accept this rather vague principle despite the fact that there are tricky problems about how to apply it in certain cases. A rational ideal bookie would be willing to give you any odds lower than 9 to 1 on a bet that the billionth digit in the decimal part of $\pi$—as yet not calculated—would turn out to be '6'. But the real, objective probability of its being '6' is either 0 or 1; whichever it is, it is certainly not 0.1, which is, by our definition, the epistemic probability relative to our present epistemic situation that the billionth digit in the decimal part of is '6'. I believe, however, that the rationality of those odds does depend on the fact that a certain judgment of real, objective probability is rational. Something like this one: The real, objective probability that a randomly selected digit in the decimal part of $\pi$ will be '6' is 0.1. I concede, however, that providing a decent explanation of why the rationality of accepting this proposition justifies accepting any odds lower than 9 to 1 in a bet that a *specified* digit in the decimal part of $\pi$ will turn out to be '6' would not be a trivial task.)

Epistemic probability, then, is not a "ground-floor" concept—either in epistemology or in the philosophy of probability. Epistemic probability is to be explained in terms of the concept of real, objective probability and some epistemic concept or concepts, such as the concept of rational belief. Consequently, anyone who refuses to believe in real, objective probability should refuse to believe in epistemic probability as well. In typical cases, the only possible way to arrive at the conclusion that $m$ to $n$ are the highest odds such that a rational ideal bookie would accept a bet that $p$ at any odds lower than $m$ to $n$ is *first* to determine what it is rational to believe that the real, objective probability of $p$ is. (Then one calculates as follows: If this probability is $i/j$, set $m = j–i$ and $n = i$.) In *all* cases, a rational judgment about the real, objective probability of *some* proposition is required. Since epistemic probability is not a ground-floor concept we need attend to it no further. Since it is to be understood in terms of real, objective probability and various epistemic notions, any argument that is formulated in terms of epistemic probability can be given an equivalent formulation in terms of what judgments about objective probability it is rational for one to make in a given epistemic situation. The arguments of the sequel will be formulated in these terms.

But what is "real, objective probability"—or, as I shall say, what is "alethic probability" (a designation formed on the model of "alethic modality")? What I shall say about objective or alethic probability represents my own understanding of this thorny concept. The account I shall give presupposes some sort of modal realism, and it presupposes that real, objective probabilities attach not only to propositions about cards and dice and balls in urns and nuns over fifty who die in motorcycle accidents (that is, not only to propositions concerning the probability of choosing an object having a certain property when one chooses at random a member of a large set of actual objects), but to a much wider class of propositions. Examples of propositions in this wider class are: the proposition that my wife will quit her job within six months (the probability of this proposition is not to be identified with the probability of, for example, a fifty-two-year-old psychiatric nurse's quitting his or her job within six months, despite the fact that my wife is a fifty-two-year-old psychiatric nurse, and the same point applies to any large, well-defined set of objects to which she belongs); the proposition that God exists; the proposition that there are vast amounts of animal suffering in nature.

Let us suppose that some sets of possible worlds have unique *measures*; these measure the proportion of logical space (of the whole set of worlds) occupied by these sets. (See the Appendix to this chapter for some constraints on the concept of a measure on a set of worlds.) And let us further suppose that all of the sets of worlds in which we shall be interested in this essay are among those that have such measures. The alethic probability of a



proposition is the measure of the set of worlds in which it is true. The conditional alethic probability of the proposition $p$ on the proposition $q$ (where the set of worlds in which $q$ is true is not of measure 0) is the proportion of the region of logical space occupied by worlds in which $q$ is true that is occupied by worlds in which $p$ is true.[4] For example, if 13 percent of the region occupied by worlds in which A is true is occupied by worlds in which B is true, then the conditional alethic probability of B on A is 0.13.[5] In the sequel, I shall frequently use phrases of the form, 'the proportion of the $p$-worlds that are $q$-worlds'. Such phrases are to be understood as abbreviations of the corresponding phrases of the form 'the proportion of the region of logical space occupied by worlds in which $p$ is true that is occupied by worlds in which $q$ is true'.

An example may help to tie this together. The conditional alethic probability of the proposition that there is intelligent life on other planets in the galaxy on the proposition that Project Ozma has negative results until the year 2010 is the proportion of the (Project Ozma has negative results until the year 2010)-worlds in which there is intelligent life on other planets in the galaxy.

We make judgments of alethic probability, both in everyday life and in the sciences. (Or we do in effect. The concepts I have introduced may not be part of the cognitive repertory of most people, but most people make judgments that entail and judgments that are entailed by propositions that are alethic probability-judgments in the present sense.[6]) And it would seem that very often such judgments are justified. For example, I judge that the conditional alethic probability of the sun's rising tomorrow on the present state of things is nearly unity, that the conditional alethic probability that the number of Douglas firs in Canada is odd is 0.5 on the proposition that I am in my present epistemic situation, that the unconditional alethic probability of $\alpha$'s being actual (where '$\alpha$' is a proper name of the actual world) is 0, and that the conditional alethic probability of there being intelligent bacteria on the proposition that there exists a physical universe is 0. Of course I could be wrong about these things; I *could* be wrong about almost anything. Nevertheless, I could give cogent arguments (or so they seem to me) in support of these probability-judgments, and I *believe* that they are fully justified.

If there are cases in which it is rational to assign alethic probabilities to various propositions, there are other cases in which one is simply not in a position to make any judgment about the probabilities of certain propositions. (From now on, I shall usually drop the qualification 'alethic' and speak simply of probabilities.) This is hardly surprising. One reason it should not be regarded as surprising can be easily grasped by reflection on the fact that probability-judgments are judgments of proportion, judgments about the proportion of a region of logical space that is occupied by some

subregion of that region. And—leaving aside for the moment the particular case of judgments about proportions of logical space and considering judgments of proportion in the abstract—it is evident that there are cases in which we are not in a position to make certain judgments of proportion.

I have drawn one of the numbers from 0 to 100 in a fair drawing from a hat, but I am not going to tell you what it is. I have put that many black balls into an empty urn and have then added 100-minus-that-many white balls. Now: What proportion of the balls in the urn are black? You have no way of answering this question: No answer you could give is epistemically defensible: "35 percent" is no better than "6 percent," "about half" is no better than "about a quarter," "a large proportion" is no better than "a small proportion," and so on.[7]

Ask me what proportion of the galaxies other than our own contain intelligent life, and I'll have to say that I don't know; no answer I could give is epistemically defensible for me. The answer could be "all" or "none" or "all but a few" or "about half." I see no reason to prefer any possible answer to this question to any of its equally specific competitors. Or such is my judgment. I could be wrong about the implications of what I think I know, but, then, as I say, I could be wrong about almost anything.

I conclude, therefore, that there are cases in which one is not in an epistemic position to give any answer to a question of the form, "What proportion of the Fs are Gs?" There would seem to be no reason to suppose that this general principle about judgments of proportionality is inapplicable in the case of regions of logical space. And it seems evident that it does apply in that case.

What proportion of the possible worlds in which things happen exactly as they have happened in the actual world before 1997 are worlds in which there is a devastating thermonuclear war between 1997 and 2097? In what proportion of them is there discovered a surveyable proof of the four-color theorem during that period? I, at least, do not profess to have any idea about what the right answers to these questions are. That is, I do not profess to have any idea of the probability (conditional on things being as they now are) of the occurrence of a thermonuclear war or the discovery of a surveyable proof of the four-color theorem during the next 100 years. In what proportion of the worlds in which I am now in my present actual epistemic situation does either of these things happen in the next 100 years? Again, I have no idea.

There are, therefore, cases in which someone is not in a position to make any judgment about the proportion of the worlds having the feature F that also have the feature G—just as there are cases in which someone is not in a position to make any judgment about what proportion of the galaxies have a certain feature. And just as one may offer cogent arguments for the conclusion that no one is in an epistemic position to make any judgment



about what proportion of the galaxies have a certain feature, there are cases in which one may offer cogent arguments for the conclusion that no one is in an epistemic position to make any judgment about what proportion of the worlds that have F also have G. In general, such arguments will not be proofs. They will have to be judged by the same standards that we employ in evaluating philosophical or political or historical arguments. The standards that are appropriately applied to such arguments are like the standards that are appropriately applied in the cases of arguments for nominalism or the military value of the Stealth bomber or the importance of the exhaustion of the Spanish silver mines for an understanding of late Roman politics.

We shall now, armed with the above discussion of probability, examine the "probabilistic Argument from Evil," the argument that is supposed to show that it is improbable that there exists an omnipotent and morally perfect being, given what we know about the evils of the world. More exactly, we shall examine one version of it, the version I believe to be the strongest and most compelling.[8]

I will present this version of the argument in terms of the idea that I have used to explain alethic probability: that regions of logical space (or at least all of them that correspond to the propositions that figure in the argument) have measures that satisfy the constraints set out in the Appendix. It will be seen that this allows us to bring to bear on the argument our intuitive capacities for making judgments of relative size and proportion. This will be useful, because we have employed these intuitive capacities all our lives in our reasoning about regions of ordinary, physical space and about sets of discrete items.

Here is the argument. Let **S** be a proposition that (correctly and in great detail and with some claim to completeness) describes the amounts and the kinds and the distribution of the sufferings of human beings and all other sentient creatures. Let **HI** (for "hypothesis of impersonality") be the proposition that the amounts and the kinds and the distribution of the sufferings of human beings and all other sentient creatures are due entirely to blind, impersonal forces. Let "Theism" be just what the name implies—with the understanding that whatever else this proposition may entail, it entails the falsity of **HI**.

Now consider three regions of logical space, those in which, respectively, **S**, **HI**, and Theism are true. (I will identify a proposition with the region of logical space in which it is true. This identification is an aid to concision and is not essential to the argument. Given this identification, $p$ & $q$ is simply the region of logical space common to $p$ and $q$.) And let us assume that **HI** and Theism are of the same size (have the same measure) or at least that neither is significantly larger than the other. Given what it seems reasonable to expect if Theism is true and what it seems reasonable to expect if the hypothesis of indifference is true, there is a good prima facie case for saying that the

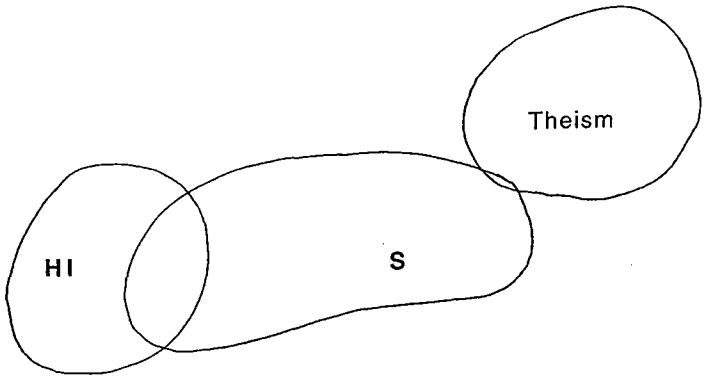


*FIGURE 5.1*

proportion of HI that overlaps S is much larger than the proportion of Theism that overlaps S. Given that HI and Theism are of the same size, it follows that the part of S that overlaps HI is much larger than the part of S that overlaps Theism. We may represent this diagrammatically (two features of the diagram are without significance: the way the diagram represents the size of S relative to the sizes of HI and Theism and the way it represents the proportion of S that overlaps neither HI nor Theism). The actual world, α, must fall within S. Hence, in the absence of further relevant considerations, the thesis that α falls within HI is epistemically preferable to the thesis that α falls within Theism. (Compare the following judgment about physical space: If a meteor has fallen somewhere within the United States, then in the absence of further relevant considerations, the thesis that it has fallen in Texas is epistemically preferable to the thesis that it has fallen in Rhode Island.) But if $p$ and $q$ are inconsistent and $p$ is epistemically preferable to $q$, then it is not reasonable to accept $q$. Hence, the theist who wishes to be reasonable must find "further relevant considerations." The theist must either refute the strong prima facie case for the thesis that the above diagram correctly represents the relative sizes of the region HI & S and the region Theism & S, or the theist must accept the diagram and present an argument for Theism, an argument for the conclusion that α falls within Theism[9] (and hence within Theism & S, a very small region of logical space). If the diagram is correct, therefore, an argument for Theism would be in effect an argument for the conclusion that α falls within a very small region of logical space (relative to the "competing" regions that surround it). It would, in consequence, have to be a very strong argument to carry much conviction, and even weak arguments for Theism (as opposed to arguments for the existence of a designer of the world or a first cause or a necessary being) are in short supply.



The theist, therefore, has only one option: to refute the prima facie case for the correctness of the probability-judgments displayed in the diagram. There is, in practice, only one way to do this.[10] The theist must provide a *theodicy*[11]—a proposition (region of logical space) $h$ that has the following two features:

- $h$ overlaps a large proportion of Theism;
- S overlaps a large proportion of Theism & $h$.[12]

This will force us to redraw the diagram (the reader is invited to try it), since it will have the consequence that Theism must overlap a part of S significantly larger than the one shown in the diagram. We should then have to admit that (given that HI and Theism are of equal size) the prima facie case for the conclusion that the proportion of HI that overlaps S is much larger than the proportion of Theism that overlaps S has been overcome.

Here is a spatial analogy. Two nonoverlapping storm systems of equal size, East and West, overlap the United States. There is a prima facie case for the thesis that the proportion of West that overlaps the United States is much larger than the proportion of East that overlaps the United States. Therefore, the part of the United States that overlaps West ("U.S./West") is, prima facie, much larger than the part of the United States that overlaps East ("U.S./East"). Therefore, in the absence of further relevant considerations, the thesis that a particular person, Alice (whom we know to be somewhere in the United States), is in U.S./West is epistemically preferable to the thesis that Alice is in U.S./East. Therefore, anyone who believes that Alice is in U.S./East is unreasonable, unless he can do one of two things: give an argument for the conclusion that Alice is in U.S./East (and it will have to be a fairly strong argument, owing to the fact that U.S./East is known to be considerably less than half the United States) *or* find a geographical region $r$ that has the following two features:

- $r$ overlaps a large proportion of the total region occupied by East;
- the United States overlaps a large proportion of the region common to $r$ and the total region occupied by East.

If we could find such a region, then, because East and West are of equal size, we should have refuted the prima facie case for the thesis that the proportion of West that overlapped the United States was much larger than the proportion of East that overlapped the United States.

To meet the evidential challenge to Theism that we have set out, the theist must discover a theodicy. But no theodicy is known: Nothing that has ever been described as a theodicy is a theodicy in the present sense of the word. Therefore, the strong prima facie case for the conclusion that HI is

epistemically preferable to Theism has not been answered. Therefore, it is not reasonable to accept Theism.

This is the evidential Argument from Evil. In the following section, I shall present a reply to this argument. The reply will be a reconstruction of some points made in of "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence."

## II

The most important thing I tried to do in "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence" may be described in our present terminology as follows: to argue for the proposition

> We are not in an epistemic position to judge that only a small proportion of Theism overlaps S.

I proposed (in effect) the following principle:

> We are not in a position to judge that only a small proportion of the *p*-worlds are *q*-worlds if there is a proposition *h* that has the following two features:
>
> - a large proportion of the *p*-&-*h*-worlds are *q*-worlds;
> - we are not in a position to make a judgment about the proportion of the *p*-worlds that are *h*-worlds.[13]

(If 'Theism' is substituted for '*p*' and 'S' for '*q*' in this principle, a proposition that satisfies both the conditions contained in the resulting proposition may be called a "defense"—as opposed to a theodicy. A defense is simply a proposition *h* such that S is highly probable on Theism & *h* and such that we are not in a position to make a judgment about how probable *h* is, given Theism. The conclusion of "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence" might be summarized in these words: To answer the probabilistic Argument from Evil, to meet the "evidential challenge" that S presents to Theism, it is not necessary to construct a theodicy; a defense suffices. For if we have a defense and if the principle is correct, then it follows that we are not in a position to make any judgment about how probable S is, given Theism. And, therefore, we are not in a position to judge that the probability of S on Theism is low; but that the probability of S on Theism is low is the central premise of the evidential Argument from Evil.)

This principle is simply an application to the special case of judgments concerning proportions of regions of logical space of a general form of reasoning that we should find it very hard to reject in the case of other sorts of judgment of proportion. Let us consider two examples, one involving proportions of geographical regions and the other involving proportions of finite sets of discrete items.



> We are not in a position to judge that only a small proportion of Spain is arable if, for a certain geographical region R, Spain and R overlap and most of the Spain-R overlap is arable and we are not in a position to make any judgment about the proportion of Spain that overlaps R.

> We are not in a position to judge that only a small proportion of the balls now in the urn are black if some balls have just been added and if most of the balls that were just added are black and we are not in a position to make any judgment about what proportion of the balls now in the urn are ones that were just added.

Both of these judgments seem undeniably correct. (They would be correct even if we knew that no part of Spain outside R was arable and that none of the original balls in the urn was black.)

In "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence," I proposed a certain hypothesis I shall call D (for 'defense').[14] I argued that a very high proportion of the Theism-&-D-worlds are S-worlds (all of them, as far as I can judge) and that no one is in an epistemic position to offer any answer to the question, What proportion of the Theism-worlds are D-worlds?[15]

If I am right about D, it follows (by the above epistemic principle) that no one is in a position to judge that only a small proportion of the Theism-worlds are S-worlds.[16] And, therefore, no one is in a position to judge that the proportion of the HI-worlds that are S-worlds is "much greater" than the proportion of the Theism-worlds that are S-worlds.[17] The probabilistic Argument from Evil therefore fails.

It has been argued[18] that this strategy, if it were generally applied, would make it all but impossible to use probabilistic reasoning to establish epistemic conclusions. Consider, for example, the following argument for the conclusion that it would be unreasonable for us to believe that smoking was safe—that is, did not *cause* serious diseases—if we knew that the following proposition

MLC Smokers get lung cancer much more frequently than nonsmokers

was true (and knew nothing else that was relevant to the question whether smoking was safe). If we were in that epistemic situation, we could reason as follows:

> Let 'SS' abbreviate 'Smoking is safe', and let 'SLC' abbreviate 'Smoking causes lung cancer'. It is evident that the following probability-judgment is prima facie correct:
>
> P(MLC/SLC) >> P(MLC/SS).

> But this shows that MLC presents an evidential challenge to SS, a challenge that could be met only by discovering either a strong argument for the conclusion that there was a reasonably high antecedent probability that smoking was safe or else some way to overcome the prima facie correctness of the probability-judgment 'P(MLC/SLC) >> P(MLC/SS)'. And neither of these things can be done. SLC is therefore epistemically preferable to SS (with which it is inconsistent). It is therefore unreasonable to accept SS.

This argument is obviously cogent. Anyone in the epistemic situation we have imagined who has considered it should be convinced by it and should accept its conclusion. (If an argument is wanted for the prima facie correctness of the probability judgment 'P(MLC/SLC) >> P(MLC/SS)', here is one that I find convincing. When I think about it, it seems fairly evident to me that the proportion of the smoking-causes-lung-cancer-worlds in which smokers get lung cancer much more frequently than nonsmokers must be—unless there is some relevant factor that I have not thought of—far greater than the proportion of the smoking-is-safe-worlds in which smokers get lung cancer much more frequently than nonsmokers. If I were asked to defend this judgment, I would list possible kinds of explanation of smokers' getting more lung cancer than nonsmokers that did not depend on the causal agency of the habit itself, and I would argue that because these explanations postulated very special sets of circumstances, they were intrinsically improbable. But my argument would, in the last analysis, have to be based on intuitive judgments of probability.)

But—the critic of my response to the probabilistic Argument from Evil contends—if the strategy I employed above for meeting the evidential challenge that S presents to Theism could be applied in the case of any evidential challenge, someone who believed that smoking was safe could meet the evidential challenge that MLC presents to SS simply by contriving the following "defense":

> GENET Lung cancer is due to genetic causes, and people who are genetically predisposed to lung cancer are genetically predisposed to smoke.

If the critic's contention is correct, it is a grave blow to if not a refutation of my reply to the probabilistic Argument from Evil. For the above probability-judgment is not only prima facie correct, but it seems evident that unless a person in the epistemic situation we have imagined could discover either a pretty strong argument for the conclusion that smoking was probably safe or else some way to overcome the prima facie correctness of the probability-judgment 'P(MLC/SLC) >> P(MLC/SS)', then it would not be reasonable for that person to believe that smoking was safe. (It does not follow that it would be reasonable for that person to believe that smoking caused lung cancer.



Our real-world knowledge that smoking causes lung cancer is based on the work of epidemiologists who have done far more than establish a positive correlation between smoking and lung cancer. They, have, for example, discovered evidence that conclusively rules out GENET.) And merely calling attention to the hypothesis I have labeled GENET does nothing to undermine the prima facie correctness of the probability-judgment 'P(MLC/SLC) >> P(MLC/SS)'.

But *am* I committed to the thesis that GENET can be used as a "defense" to block the evidential challenge to the thesis that smoking is safe that is provided by MLC? An argument parallel to my counterargument to the probabilistic Argument from Evil (one that employed GENET in the role I gave to D) would go like this:

> We are not in an epistemic position to judge that only a small proportion of the SS-worlds are MLC-worlds, owing to the fact that most SS-&-GENET-worlds are MLC-worlds, and we are not in an epistemic position to make any judgment about the proportion of the SS-worlds that are GENET-worlds.

But we *are* in an epistemic position to make a judgment about the proportion of the SS-worlds that are GENET-worlds. We are in an epistemic position to make the judgment that this proportion is very low. Surely only a very small proportion of the worlds in which smoking is safe are worlds in which there is such a thing as lung cancer and it has a genetic cause and the very same factors that genetically predispose people to get lung cancer also genetically predispose people to smoke? (What proportion of the worlds in which it's safe to wear gold jewelry are worlds in which skin cancer has a genetic cause and the very same genetic factors that predispose people to skin cancer also predispose them to enjoy wearing gold jewelry?) Suppose that you know that you are somehow to be "placed" in a world in which smoking is safe, a world that has been chosen at random from among all the worlds in which smoking is safe. How likely do you think it is that you will find that in this world lung cancer exists, has a genetic cause, and, moreover, has a genetic cause that predisposes people to smoke? *I* wouldn't bet on this complex of factors turning up. I suppose my reasoning is that in general, in the absence of further considerations, worlds in which two things that are logically and causally unrelated (save, possibly, by a common cause) have a common cause must be "rare"; worlds in which a taste for avocados and the enjoyment of medieval Latin lyrics have a common cause (genetic or social or whatever), do not, I would judge, collectively take up much logical space. In any case, if I were not in a position to judge that only a small proportion of SS-worlds were GENET-worlds, I should not have been able to give the argument that convinced me that the probability-judgment 'P(MLC/SLC) >> P(MLC/SS)' was prima facie correct: I should not have been able to say, "The proportion of the smoking-is-

hazardous-worlds in which smokers get lung cancer much more frequently than nonsmokers is—unless there is some relevant factor that I have not thought of—far greater than the proportion of the smoking-is-safe-worlds in which smokers get lung cancer much more frequently than nonsmokers." I was able to make this judgment only because I was able to judge that the proportion of smoking-is-safe-worlds in which smokers get lung cancer much more frequently than nonsmokers is low. And I should not have been able to make this judgment if I were not in a position to judge that only a small proportion of SS-worlds are GENET-worlds.[19] Indeed, much of the argument of the present paragraph is no more than a spelling out of the reasons I had initially for accepting the prima facie credibility of the judgment 'P(MLC/SLC) >> P(MLC/SS)'.

## Appendix: Constraints on the Concept of a Measure on a Set of Worlds

We adopt the following conventions concerning and constraints on the notion of the measure of a set of worlds. All measures are real numbers between (and including) 0 and 1 (there are, therefore, no infinitesimal measures); the measure of the whole of logical space is 1, and the measure of the empty set is 0; if a set (*sc.* of worlds) has a measure, then its union with a set $x$ has a measure iff $x$ has a measure; if a set is exhaustively decomposed into a finite number of nonoverlapping subsets each of which has a measure, the measure of this set (by the previous statement it has a measure) is the sum of the measures of those subsets; if a set of measure $P$ has $n$ members, where $n$ is finite (and not 0), an $m$-membered subset of that set has the measure $m\ P/n$; if there are infinitely many possible worlds, any set of lower cardinality than the whole set has measure 0. It should be noted that these statements *define* "measure" only if the number of possible worlds is finite. If there are infinitely many worlds—and surely there are?—the notion of the measure of a set of worlds gets most of such content as it has from the intuitive notion of the proportion of logical space that a set of worlds occupies.

In the text of the essay, I sometimes speak of the proportion of logical space that a set of worlds occupies as its "size." "Size" in this sense must be carefully distinguished from cardinality. The cardinality of a set may indeed be said to measure its "size" in one perfectly good sense of the word, but there are other measures of the "sizes" of certain sets, measures that are in general independent of cardinality. In point-set topology, for example, regions of space are identified with sets of points, and some regions are assigned such cardinality-independent measures of size as length, area, and volume. There is obviously a close conceptual connection between such measures and the concept of probability. Suppose, for example, that darts are thrown at a wall "at random" or "without bias" (i.e., by a method that favors no point on or region of the wall). The probability that a given dart that strikes the wall will strike a given region of the wall is the proportion of the whole wall that is occupied by that region: the ratio of the area of that region to the area of the whole wall. It is this conceptual connection between probability and area (and length and volume) that is the reason for the heuristic utility of thinking of the set of all worlds as forming a space such that many of its subsets may be assigned measures of size that (like length, area, and volume in respect of sets of points in space) are not in general functions of their cardinality. Just as two sets of points of the same cardinality may be "spread out" in such a way as to occupy different proportions of some region of the plane, so two sets of worlds of the same cardinality may be "spread out" in such a way as to occupy different proportions of logical space. Do we understand these ideas, the idea of sets of worlds being "spread out in logical space" and the idea of their having measures that depend not only on their cardinalities but also on the way they are spread out? In my view, we understand them as well or as badly as we understand the assignment of (real, objective) numerical probabilities to propositions like "My wife will quit her job within six months" or "God exists" or "There exist vast amounts of animal suffering in the natural world." This, at any rate, is true in my case.



### Notes

1. "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 135–165. Reprinted in Daniel Howard-Snyder, ed., *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 151–174, and in Peter van Inwagen, *God, Knowledge, and Mystery: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 66–95. The present essay is an adaptation of parts of a long essay called "Reflections on the Essays of Draper, Gale, and Russell," which also appeared in *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (pp. 219–243). That essay was a reply to three essays critical of "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence" that were included in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*. The purpose of the present essay is to present some of the arguments of "Reflections on the Essays of Draper, Gale, and Russell" in a way that is independent of those three critical essays.

2. See Paul Draper, "Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists," *Noûs* 23 (1989): 331–350. See especially p. 349, n. 2.

3. Matters of vagueness aside. The relation "acceptance" that (in my view) holds between certain persons and certain propositions is vague in the same sense—whatever that sense may be—as the relations "is the same color as" or "is a friend of" or "has seriously injured." If, say, Alice, who until recently has been a convinced Christian, is undergoing a deep crisis of faith, there may be no definite answer to the

question whether, at the present moment, she accepts the proposition that Jesus was raised from the dead. It may be simply *indeterminate* whether she accepts this proposition. But I very much doubt whether what philosophers have meant by "degrees of belief" has anything to do with the fact that acceptance is, like almost all the relations that figure in our everyday discourse, in some sense vague.

4. Or, equivalently, the ratio of the measure of the set of worlds in which both $p$ and $q$ are true to the measure of the set of worlds in which $q$ is true. This definition (in either form) can have counterintuitive consequences if the number of worlds is infinite and $q$ is true in only a finite number of worlds. Consequently, one might want to define conditional probability "separately" for this case. I shall not bother about this very special case.

5. I have defined both the alethic probability of a proposition and the alethic probability of a proposition conditional on another proposition. I have not defined conditional *epistemic* probability, and how to do so is an interesting question. But since I shall be conducting my argument solely in terms of (what it is rational to believe about) alethic probabilities, I shall not need to answer it.

6. I concede that "pure" judgments of unconditional alethic probability are pretty rare, since the unconditional alethic probability of most propositions that interest us is either very, very large or very, very small. The true unconditional alethic probability of the proposition that the sun will rise tomorrow is (I should imagine) very, very small, since the portion of logical space in which the sun so much as exists is (I should imagine) very, very small—perhaps of 0 measure. (Stephen Hawking has said that it is quite plausible to suppose that the set of worlds in which there is organic life is of 0 measure.) And if this is so, then the unconditional alethic probability of the *denial* of this proposition is very, very large; perhaps 1. I take it that when we apparently say that certain propositions have real, objective probabilities like $\frac{2}{3}$ or 0.7116, we are actually making this statement about their conditional probability on some "understood" proposition—perhaps in many cases the proposition that records the state of things in the actual world at the time of utterance. And this would also seem to be the case even with many judgments that apparently assign propositions unconditional probabilities close to 0 or 1. For example, the judgment that the (real, objective) probability that the sun will rise tomorrow is very near to unity is best understood as the judgment that in almost the entirety of that region of logical space in which things are as they are at present in the actual world, the sun rises tomorrow.

The judgments of real, objective probability that a rational bookmaker uses to calculate odds are usually judgments conditional on an hypothesis involving his epistemic situation at the time of the calculation. When, for example, he judges that the real, objective probability of *this* die's falling 2, 3, 5, or 6 a moment from *now* is $\frac{2}{3}$, he is not judging that this or any die falls that way a moment from now in two-thirds of the whole of logical space (or even in two-thirds of the region of logical space in which things are exactly as they are at present in the actual world, for that might be false given strict, causal determinism—which he may not be in a position to rule out); rather he is judging that in two-thirds of the region of logical space in which he is in *this* epistemic situation and *this* die (or perhaps the die that plays *this* role in relation to someone in this epistemic situation?) is thrown in a moment, it falls 2, 3, 5, or 6.



7. More exactly, no answer is better than any *equally specific* competing answer. Of course there are answers like "between 1 percent and 90 percent" that have a pretty good crack at being right. But this answer is no better than "between 7 percent and 96 percent" or "either between 4 percent and 6 percent or else between 10 percent and 97 percent."

8. This argument is based on Draper's "Pain and Pleasure.".

9. Or, more generally, an argument for some thesis that would undermine the prima facie credibility of the proposition that **HI** is epistemically preferable to Theism. Arguments for the conclusion that $\alpha$ does not fall within **HI** or for the conclusion that it is more plausible to suppose that $\alpha$ falls within Theism than within **HI** are other possibilities. For the sake of simplicity, I will not discuss other possibilities.

10. Of course there is the formal possibility that one might find some reason to reject the assumption that **HI** and Theism are of about equal unconditional probability, that they are regions of logical space of about the same size. The ontological argument is, in effect, an argument for the conclusion that Theism spans the whole of logical space and thus is much larger than **HI** (which would presumably be the empty set of worlds if the ontological argument is sound). But every version of the ontological argument is either invalid or depends on a premise that enjoys an epistemic position no better than that of Theism, whatever that position may be. No other known argument or consideration seems even relevant to the task of showing that the unconditional probability of Theism is significantly greater than the unconditional probability of **HI**.

11. This special, technical use of 'theodicy' is Paul Draper's. (See the essay cited in note 2 above). A "theodicy" is a proposition $h$ such that (i) $h$ is highly probable on Theism and (ii) S is highly probable (or at least not too improbable) on Theism & $h$.

12. Or a proportion that is not too small. I will ignore this refinement.

13. Suppose that someone were to argue that this principle, even if it were correct, could not be used to block an evidential challenge to Theism, owing to the fact that P(S/**HI**) could be "much larger than" P(S/Theism) even if P(S/Theism) were fairly high. (The former might be, say, 0.9 and the latter 0.6.) But I should not regard an "evidential challenge" to Theism as very impressive unless "much larger than" implied (at least) "several times larger than." If it could be somehow demonstrated to me that P(S/**HI**) = 0.9 and P(S/Theism) = 0.6, I should not regard this as a demonstration that it was unreasonable to accept Theism in the absence of a strong argument for Theism. I shall assume that if P($p$) is "much larger than" P($q$), this implies that P($q$) is "small"—even if P($p$) = 1.

14. D was the conjunction of the following three propositions:

> 1. Every possible world that contains higher-level sentient creatures either contains patterns of suffering morally equivalent to those recorded by S or else is massively irregular.
> 2. Some important intrinsic or extrinsic good depends on the existence of higher-level sentient creatures; this good is of sufficient magnitude that it outweighs the patterns of suffering recorded by S.
> 3. Being massively irregular is a defect in a world, a defect at least as great as the defect of containing patterns of suffering morally equivalent to those recorded by S.

15. At any rate, my arguments, if they were correct, showed that no one is in a position to rule out the answer "all of them." It may be that one could give a plausible a priori argument for the conclusion that various modal considerations entail that the answer must be "all of them" or "none of them." But a dispute about this point would be of no consequence. If the answer to the question, What proportion of the balls now in the urn were just added? were known to be either "all of them" or "none of them," that would not affect the validity of the conclusion that we are not in a position to judge that only a small proportion of the balls now in the urn are black.

16. It also follows that D has no epistemic probability on Theism (relative to our epistemic situation)—nor does D have an epistemic probability on, say, the totality of what science makes it reasonable for us to believe at the present time. It is easy to see that there are propositions that have no epistemic probability. Remember the case in which I chose a number $n$ ($0 \leq n \leq 100$) at random, and placed $n$ black balls and 100-$n$ white balls in an empty urn. What is the epistemic probability (relative to a situation in which one knows just this much) of the proposition that the first ball drawn from the urn will be black? A rational ideal bookie, contemplating this situation, will see that because he has no way to determine what the real, objective probability of the first ball's being black is, he has no way to set odds. (Do not confuse this case with the following case: The number *n has not yet been drawn* and the bookie is told that it will be and then the urn prepared and then a ball drawn. In *this* case, the real, objective probability that the ball will be black is 0.5, and the bookie would take the bet at any odds less than even odds.) Although one way of setting the odds is *objectively* better than any of the others (if, for example, the number of black balls in the urn is in fact thirty-six, the best course is to accept a bet that the first ball will be black at any odds lower than (100–36)/36 or 16/9 and at no higher odds), the bookie has no way of *knowing* which way of setting the odds is objectively the best. An ideal bookie who was forced, in this epistemic situation, to post odds for a bet that the first ball would be black could only *choose at random* the odds at which he would accept the bet. No odds, therefore, are *the* odds that a rational ideal bookie in this situation *would* set, and, as a consequence, the proposition that the first ball drawn will be black has no epistemic probability relative to this epistemic situation.

A more interesting if more problematic example: In my view, the proposition that a surveyable proof of the four-color theorem will be discovered in the next century has no epistemic probability (relative to my present epistemic situation) on any proposition I know or believe to be true.

17. In note 9 to "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence," I wrote

> Well, one might somehow know the probability of S on Theism as a function of the probability of HI on Theism; one might know that the former probability was one-tenth the latter, and yet have no idea what either probability was. But that is not the present case. The [probabilistic argument from evil] essentially involves two independent probability-judgments: that the probability of S on HI is at least not too low, and that the probability of S on Theism is very low.

This concession now seems to me to have been needless (although the point about the independence of the two probability judgments is certainly correct). If I know that probability A is ten times probability B, then I know that B is less than or equal to 0.1, and I *am*, therefore, in a position to make a judgment about the magnitude of B. If one is not in a position to judge that the probability of B is low, then it cannot be true that one knows that some other probability is ten times greater than B. If one is not in a position to judge that the proportion of Spain that is arable is low, then it cannot be that one knows that the proportion of France that is arable is ten times the proportion of Spain that is arable. (Compare note 13.)



18. By Paul Draper, in "The Skeptical Theist," which appeared in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, pp. 175–192.

19. In my view, this judgment does not depend upon my knowledge of the relation between smoking and cancer. It is simply an application of very general and abstract principles about causal relations (primarily the "low probability of common cause" principle that I appealed to earlier in the paragraph to which this note is appended), principles that I may very well know a priori. Whether or not my knowledge of them is a priori, it is certainly knowledge that I possessed before I first learned of the correlation between smoking and cancer.

# Chapter Six

# *Of "Of Miracles"*

In the first and briefer part of this essay, my concerns are ontological. I shall explain what a miracle *is* (or would be if there were any). In the second part, my concerns are epistemological: I shall discuss and attempt to refute Hume's argument for the conclusion that it is unreasonable to believe any historical report that would count as a report of a miracle.

## The Ontology of Miracles

The account of "miracles" that I shall present here is a summary of the account I presented in "The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God."[1] (It is, I believe, entirely consistent with Hume's "official" definition of 'miracle': "a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent." And, I believe, it will not weaken Hume's argument for the conclusion that it would be unreasonable to accept any report of an alleged "miracle" if, in evaluating his argument, we understand the word in the sense I supply in the present section.)

Let us suppose that the physical world is made up of certain fundamental building blocks or units, certain tiny physical things without proper parts. I shall call them elementary particles. Elementary particles are sorted into kinds by their causal powers (e.g., rest mass and charge). It will simplify my account of miracles if I make the assumption (false, of course, at least in our present state of knowledge) that there is only one type of elementary particle. Each particle is continuously sustained in existence by God: At each instant, he supplies it with existence and the causal powers it then has. The motions over the interval $t_1$-$t_2$ of the particles that compose the world are determined (insofar as they are determined) entirely by their distribution at $t_1$ and the causal powers they have at each instant in $t_1$-$t_2$. (Here we make a second simplifying assumption: that the propagation of causal influence is instantaneous.)

God always, *or almost always*, supplies each particle with the same causal powers. But he may, *very rarely*, supply *just a few* particles—"just a

few" in comparison with the number of all the particles there are—with different causal powers from the powers they normally have. If he momentarily supplies some of the particles in a certain small region of space with powers different from their normal powers, the particles in that region will follow trajectories different from the trajectories they would have followed if he had continued to supply them with their normal powers. Here is a preliminary definition of 'miracle': The early stages of any such "divergence" constitute a miracle. (The later stages of a divergence will be classified as "consequences of a miracle" and not "parts of a miracle.")

Now a qualification and refinement of this definition. A proposition will be called a law of nature in a possible world $x$ if it is a contingent proposition that is true in every world $y$ in which particles *always* have the causal powers that they *always or almost always* have in $x$. If some particles in the world $x$ do sometimes have "unusual" powers, some of the propositions that are laws in $x$ may be false propositions in $x$. (If $x$ is a deterministic world, this must be so.) If a proposition $p$ is both a law of nature in $x$ and false in $x$, it will be said to be violated in $x$; it will be violated by the behavior of those particles that (owing to their or their neighbors' unusual causal powers) follow trajectories inconsistent with the truth of $p$.

If a world is indeterministic, some events that are miracles according to our preliminary definition may not involve violations of laws. If the laws of a world allow A to be followed either by B or by C, and if God temporarily changes the causal powers of certain particles in such a way as to determine that A be followed by B, the consequent occurrence of B will be a miracle by our preliminary definition but will not be a violation of the laws of the world in which it occurs. In "The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God," my topic was Providence, and it suited my purposes to have a definition of 'miracle' that had this feature. In the present essay, however, I wish to conform my usage (more or less) to Hume's. I shall, therefore, understand 'miracle' to imply 'violation of the laws of nature'. God performs a miracle, then, if he momentarily supplies certain particles with unusual causal powers and the consequent divergence of the trajectories of those (and no doubt some other) particles from the courses they would have followed is a violation of the laws of nature. (Of course, a violation of one law will in most cases be a violation of many, since if two propositions are laws, so is their conjunction.) The miracle is the early stages of the divergence.

## Hume's Argument

In this section, I shall present and attempt to refute the central argument of "Of Miracles."[2] More exactly, the argument I shall present and attempt to refute is my own reconstruction of the central argument of "Of Miracles." I believe that there are, in Hume's presentation of his argument, certain infelicities that arise from his imprecise use of terminology, and my reconstruction is designed to remove them. To subject one's reconstruction of a philosopher's argument to criticisms of one's own devising is a somewhat dubious procedure, and it is dubious on two grounds: First, one's "improvements" may be ones that the author of the original argument would reject, and, worse, they may introduce defects into the argument that were not present in the original. I think, however, that the points I shall make against the reconstructed argument would apply to the original even if Hume would have emphatically rejected my modifications of his argument and even if these modifications introduced errors that were not present in the original.



What, exactly, is the conclusion of the central argument of "Of Miracles"? It is a commonplace that Hume's conclusion is not ontological: He does not claim to show that there are no miracles. His conclusion is epistemological. But it is not that one should not believe that there are miracles. It is not so general as that. It has to do with the attitude one should take toward any (supposed, putative) report of a miracle one might encounter. It is something like this: If one hears a report of a miracle, one should not believe it (or one should believe it only in very special circumstances, circumstances so special that no one has in fact ever been in them). But this formulation of Hume's conclusion raises two important questions. First, what counts as a "report of a miracle"? Secondly, does "one should not believe it" mean "one should reject it" or "one should refrain from accepting it"—or perhaps some third thing?

Let us say that a report of a miracle (or a miracle-report) is any narrative, presented as historical or factual, such that (a) it does not follow logically from that narrative that a miracle has occurred, and (b) if the narrative were true, the only reasonable conclusion would be that at least one of the events it recounted was a miracle.[3] The following story

> Jill was about to cross Sixth Avenue in New York when, all in an instant, she was miraculously translated to Sydney,

does not satisfy the terms of this definition, since it follows logically from the story that a miracle has occurred.[4] Here, by way of contrast, are two stories that—whatever other features they may have—do not logically entail that a miracle has occurred:

> Jill was about to cross Sixth Avenue in New York when, without any sensation of motion, she suddenly found herself in Sydney.[5]

> And when he got into the boat his disciples followed him. And behold there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke

him, saying, "Save us, Lord, for we are perishing." And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O men of little faith?" Then he rose and he rebuked the wind and the sea, and there was a great calm. And the men marveled, saying, "What manner of man is this that even the wind and the wave obey him?" (Matt. 8:23–27).[6]

Whether either of these two stories satisfies condition (b) in our definition of 'miracle-report'—and thereby qualifies as a miracle-report—is an epistemological question: Given that the story was true, would the only reasonable conclusion be that one of the events recounted in the story was a miracle?[7] It would be possible to argue, some no doubt have argued, that one should never believe of any story (unless it logically entails the occurrence of a miracle) that if that story is true, some of the events it recounts were miracles. One should rather believe (the argument might continue) that if the story is true, there is *some* explanation of the events it relates that is consistent with the laws of nature and this explanation is the correct explanation. (It is not hard to provide gestures at such explanations. Take the story of the stilling of the storm. This story could be embedded in a logically consistent science fiction novel according to which Christianity was "founded" by extraterrestrial beings as an adjunct to a project involving the manipulation of human history; it might be that, in the novel, all the "miracles" related in the New Testament actually happened—at least as far as appearances went—but were the products of an advanced technology rather than true miracles.)

I shall not attempt to answer the (intrinsically very interesting) question whether there in fact are any stories that satisfy the terms of the above definition of 'miracle-report', for the cogency of Hume's argument does not depend on what the right answer to this question is. His conclusion is that one should react in a certain way to any miracle-report one encounters, and his reasoning can be evaluated independently of the question whether anyone ever does encounter any miracle-reports.

But what *does* Hume say about how one should react to a miracle-report? Is his position simply that one should *not* believe the report, or is it that one should *disbelieve* (not believe *and* believe the denial of) the report—or is it some third thing? I do not think that Hume is clear or entirely consistent about the matter, but I believe that the best way to state his conclusion is this: One should *dismiss* any miracle-report one encounters. The concept of dismissal may be spelled out as follows: One dismisses a report—an allegedly historical narrative—if one either disbelieves it or (does not believe it and) assigns it a very low probability.[8] (How low? Well, let's say very low—a probability of the sort that we describe in ordinary speech by phrases like 'of insignificant probability' and 'no real possibility'.)

We shall need one more definition before we turn to Hume's argument for this conclusion. Let us say that a proposition is a *contravention of one's experience* (for short, a contravention) if the truth of that proposition is contrary to one's experience.[9] ("Contravention"—this may be true of "miracle-report" as well—is obviously a person-and-time-relative concept: A proposition may be a contravention of one person's experience and not of another's—or a proposition may be a contravention of a person's experience at one time and not at another. I shall, however, generally speak of contraventions and miracle-reports *sans phrase* and leave it to the reader to fill in the necessary qualifications about person-and-time relativity. And I shall speak of various propositions as "contrary to experience" without bothering to specify whose experience they are contrary to.) Contraventions, moreover, come in "sizes": $p$ is a larger or greater contravention than $q$ if, although $q$ is contrary to experience, $p$ is "even more contrary to experience" than $q$.[10] (At this point it should be evident, if it was not already, that I am presenting a reconstruction of Hume's argument, for Hume speaks of "greater" and "lesser" *miracles*, and he employs no term that corresponds to my "contravention.") If I tell my friends that on a recent trip from Boston to Los Angeles my 1973 Cadillac averaged sixty miles to the gallon, what I tell them will no doubt be a contravention. If Calvin tells his mother that the jammy handprints on the new sofa were put there not by himself but by an evil Calvin doppelgänger constructed by beings from Arcturus, that will also be a contravention, and perhaps there is some intuitive sense in which it is a larger contravention than the one I have asserted. An *historical narrative* will be called a contravention if its propositional content is a contravention.



I will now present Hume's argument, or my reconstruction of it. The argument has three premises, two epistemological premises and one "historical" premise. The first epistemological premise is:

E1. Any miracle-report must necessarily be a contravention and, in fact, a very *large* contravention.[11] (If a story is a miracle-report for some audience, it will also be a contravention for that audience. If a story is not a contravention, it will not qualify as a miracle-report. Suppose, for example, that we hear the story of Jill's sudden translation from New York to Sydney. It may or may not be reasonable for us to classify this as a miracle-report, but if the proposition that people sometimes find themselves suddenly on the other side of the earth is not contrary to experience, a necessary condition for classifying the story as a miracle-report will be absent. There are, moreover, stories that are contraventions but not large enough contraventions to qualify as miracle-reports. If I am told that Sally, who was hitherto entirely ignorant of French, spoke perfect French after spending three months in France, that story would be a contravention but no doubt not one that is large enough to qualify as a miracle-report. And how large a contra-

vention must a miracle report be? One way to answer this question would be to specify some story that is a large enough contravention by just about anyone's reckoning to be a miracle-report and say, "At least as large as that." I think that the following story will do for this purpose: Let us suppose that we have heard a report of a shaman in Peru who has, it is alleged, restored several incontestably long-dead people to life. Suppose we are willing to agree that this story is "more contrary to experience" than the story of Sally's remarkably quick mastery of French. Then, according to the criterion I have proposed, the story of Sally is not a large enough contravention to be a miracle-report.

We should note that it does not follow from the proposed criterion that just any story that is as large a contravention as the "shaman" story *is* a miracle-report. Indeed, it does not follow from anything we have said that the "shaman" story itself is a miracle-report. And if someone maintained that Calvin's story of the origin of the jammy handprints was as large a contravention as the "shaman" story, despite the fact that Calvin's story was not a miracle-report and the "shaman" story was, that person would have said nothing inconsistent with the proposed criterion. Let us say that any contravention that is at least as large as the "shaman" story is *very large*.)

The second epistemological premise requires a little stage-setting. Let us say that two narratives are (historically) independent if neither is derived from the other. Two narratives will be said to support each other if they are independent and "tell the same story"—(purport to) describe events that are the same or at least very similar. ("Similarity" is to include the elements "cast of characters" and "place and time.") Hume's second epistemological premise is

E2. One should dismiss any very large contravention one encounters unless one knows that one of the following two conditions holds:

(a) if the very large contravention is unhistorical—if it is not a reasonably accurate description of events that actually happened—its existence is itself a contravention and a larger contravention than its truth would be

(b) it is one of two or more mutually supporting narratives such that if they are unhistorical, their (collective) existence is a contravention and a larger contravention than their truth (i.e., the truth of their common propositional content) would be.

(Suppose that X tells me that Jimmy Carter is a tool of malign extraterrestrial beings. And suppose no one else has told me that. X's statement is a very large contravention[12] and should therefore be dismissed—unless X's telling me falsely that Carter is a tool of malign extraterrestrial beings is a



contravention and a larger contravention than his being a tool of malign extraterrestrial beings would be. Or suppose that shortly after X has told me that Carter is a tool of malign extraterrestrial beings, Y tells me the same thing. And suppose I am somehow satisfied that X's statement and Y's statement are historically independent. I should dismiss what they have told me—unless the existence of two independent false allegations that Carter is a tool of malign extraterrestrial beings is a contravention and a larger contravention than his being a tool of malign extraterrestrial beings would be.)

Here, finally, is Hume's "historical" premise:

H. Although it may be possible to imagine a miracle-report that satisfies one or the other of the conditions set out in E2, no miracle-report known to history satisfies either; indeed, all known narratives that anyone might be inclined to classify as miracle-reports (such as the Gospel story of the stilling of the storm) fall far short of satisfying either of them.

I will make a few remarks about E2 and H and then proceed to argue against E1. I shall, in discussing Hume's views, write as if he were familiar with the vocabulary and distinctions of the present essay. I believe that this anachronism could be eliminated from my argument, although only at the cost of a great deal of circumlocution.

Hume wrote in an era when photography and sound recordings had not yet been invented—in an era when almost the only evidence as to what had occurred in the past was human testimony. No doubt if he were writing today, he would want emend E2 to take account of "nontestimonial" evidence about the past. But any such emendation of E2 would affect no point of principle, and the question of its proper formulation need not detain us.

It is evident that Hume believed that clause (a) in E2 could not possibly be satisfied, for (such is human credulity and epistemic frailty) the proposition that a given person has made a false statement about the past could not possibly be a "very large" contravention. Hume's position was, therefore, that the only possibility of a case in which a very large contravention should not be dismissed would be of this sort: It was one of two or more historically independent contraventions with essentially the same propositional content. It is, however, unclear whether Hume thought that even a very large number of mutually supporting false statements about the past could constitute a "very large" contravention. In introducing the important "eight-day darkness" example ("Thus, suppose, all authors, in all languages, agree, that, from the first of January 1600, there was a total darkness over the whole earth for eight days . . . . "), he says, "For I own, that otherwise [i.e., if we imagine testimony much more extensive and uniform than the testimony to the supposed miracles foundational to Christianity and its rivals], there may possibly be miracles, or violations of the usual

course of nature, of such a kind as to admit of proof from human testimony, though, perhaps, it will be impossible to find any such in all the records of history." Although Hume uses the word 'miracle' here, he goes on to say that although philosophers of his own day, if they had available to them the testimony he imagines, ought to grant the historicity of the eight-day darkness (in fact, they should "receive it as certain"), they should proceed to "search for the causes whence it might be derived"—and hence they should presumably *not* regard the darkness as a miracle as the term is "accurately defined" ("A transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent") but only in the loose and much weaker sense he has supplied: as a violation of the usual course of nature. He then argues that various (unspecified) analogies with known events suggest that a universal eight-day darkness "comes within the reach of human testimony, if that testimony be very extensive and uniform." And this statement implies that other imaginable events might not come within the reach of any testimony, however extensive and uniform. This argument is immediately followed by an example of such an imaginable event: the death and "resurrection" of Elizabeth I. It seems likely, therefore, that Hume would maintain that no imaginable human testimony could be such that its falsity would be what we are calling a very large contravention. And from this and our two epistemological premises, it follows that any imaginable miracle-report should be dismissed.

Even if I have not interpreted Hume correctly, however, even if, in his view, there are imaginable miracle-reports that should not be *dismissed*, it does not follow from this that any imaginable miracle-report should be *accepted*. (I do not believe that the story of King Alfred and the cakes is false—that is, I do not assent to the proposition that the story of King Alfred and the cakes is false. And I do not think that the probability of this story's being true is so low as to be insignificant. I therefore do not *dismiss* the story of Alfred and the cakes. But I certainly do not assent to the proposition that the story is *true*—and, in fact, I think it's very unlikely to be true.) And I think that it would certainly be Hume's position that none should be: Whether or not every imaginable miracle-report should be dismissed, no imaginable miracle-report should be accepted. No imaginable miracle-report should be accepted because a miracle-report, no matter what testimony might support it, is a very large contravention, and no testimonial evidence in favor of a very large contravention could be so good as to make it worthy of belief—even if it were possible for there to be testimonial evidence good enough to lead the judicious reasoner not to dismiss it. (In the most favorable possible case, there would be, as Hume says, "a mutual destruction of arguments.") And, of course, if we leave the realm of the merely imaginable and turn to the actual and historical, it is clear—this is the import of our "historical" premise—that Hume believes that all actual miracle-reports should be dismissed.[13]



Is Hume's argument, as I have reconstructed it, cogent? I think not. My defense of this judgment begins with an examination of E1, the premise that any miracle-report must be a very large contravention. That is, for any story about the past one might hear, one should refuse to make the following judgment about it:

> If that story is true, then some of the events it relates involve violations of the laws of nature,

unless one is also willing to make the following judgment:

> That story is contrary to my experience—and *as* contrary to my experience as the "shaman" story.

In order to evaluate this premise, we must turn to a question we have so far glossed over. What is it for a story to be "contrary to one's experience"? Hume generally writes as if the following were true: A story is contrary to one's experience if that story involves something's having the property F and the property G and one has observed many things having the property F and has observed that all of them had the complement of G. For example, on this account, a story about a man's returning from the dead is contrary to my experience owing simply to the fact that I have known of a very large number of people who have died and all of them have the property "not having returned from the dead." But this account of what it is for a story to be contrary to one's experience is useless for Hume's purposes, since it will classify far too many stories as contrary to one's experience. Suppose for example, that I know of many visits that Tom has made to his mother over the past ten years; it is all but inevitable that if I hear a detailed account of his latest visit to her, this account will ascribe to this visit some property that all of the others lacked. And this will be true even if we do not "count" the *date* of the latest visit as a relevant property. It may, for example, be that the story I have been told of his latest visit includes the information that he arrived on her doorstep at 3:21 P.M. and that the comprehensive diary I have for some reason kept of his earlier visits reveals that on all the other occasions on which he has visited her he arrived at some other time. No doubt we could play a lengthy game of "counterexample and revision" with the above account of what it is for a story to be contrary to experience. But I do not know of any way of "improving" this account that will enable it to avoid consequences like the following: The first reports of someone's making a solo flight across the Atlantic or running a four-minute mile or reaching the summit of Mount Everest were contrary to the experience of those who heard them.

But might Hume not reply that these consequences are acceptable? Might he not argue that such reports would indeed be a *bit* contrary to the experience of those who heard them? Might he not go on to say, "But it would be

*more* contrary to the experience of those who heard them if all the reports of these events were false, and that is why it was proper for those who heard the reports to believe them"? Perhaps so. But how, then, are we to understand the relevant notion of *degree* of contrariety? If I hear on Monday that Lindbergh has flown across the Atlantic without a copilot and on Tuesday that a rival has flown across the Atlantic without an aircraft, on what basis am I to judge that the second story is more contrary to my experience (is a larger contravention) than the first? My experience tells me that all previous transatlantic flights have involved an aircraft of some sort, but it also tells me that all previous transatlantic flights have involved two or more pilots. There simply do not seem to be any materials in the "property-complement" account of a story's being contrary to experience from which to construct an account of the concept of one story's being "more contrary to experience" than another is.

Let us consider an actual example (at least I believe it to be actual, although, unfortunately, I no longer remember where I heard or read it) of someone's applying the "property-complement" account of this concept. Thomas Jefferson was once told that in a museum in Cambridge (Massachusetts) there was exhibited a stone that had fallen from the sky. Jefferson declined to believe this story on the ground that although he had never known a stone to fall from the sky, he had often known a Yankee parson—the staff of Harvard College in those days comprised Congregational ministers—to prevaricate. (He had observed the sky on many occasions, and on each of those occasions, it had the property "not being the source of a falling stone"; he had observed many Yankee parsons making assertions, and on many of these occasions, the assertions had the property "being a lie." He concluded that stones falling from the sky were contrary to his experience and lying Yankee parsons were not.) Now even if Jefferson's statement about his experience of the New England clergy was something of an exaggeration, he was no doubt telling the truth when he said he had never known a stone to fall from the sky. But there were many, many things he had "never known" that he wouldn't have been disinclined to believe reports of, even reports from Yankee parsons. If he thought the story unlikely on the basis of his experience, it cannot have been simply because such a thing had never happened in his experience. If the story was indeed "contrary to his experience," it cannot have been simply because events of the type related in the story were not included in the totality of his experience to date. This observation might lead us to conclude that the "property-complement" account of an event's being contrary to experience must be replaced by some other account.

Was there *any* sense in which the story Jefferson was told was contrary to his experience? Well, suppose that Jefferson had fallen asleep like Rip van Winkle and had slept till the existence and nature of meteors was common knowledge. Suppose that, on awakening, he was given an encyclopedia article on the subject to read and had afterward received the testimony of several eminent (Virginian) astronomers that what the article said was true. Would he have been in a position to complain that his eighteenth-century experience was misleading—that it had somehow "told" him that stones never fell from the sky when stones in fact sometimes *do* fall from the sky? Certainly not. No doubt Descartes was wrong in holding that the testimony of experience was never false, but it does not seem to have testified falsely to Jefferson on this point. Experience may have testified to some persons at some points in history that the earth is at the center of the universe or that maggots are spontaneously generated in dung, but it has never testified to anyone that stones do not fall from the sky (or, for most people, that they do—not "directly," not otherwise than via the testimony of other people; for most people, "direct" experience has had nothing to say about whether stones fall from the sky). Although experience may have testified that if stones ever fall from the sky, their doing so is a very uncommon event, it has not testified that stones never fall from the sky.



It is very hard indeed to find a sense in which experience testifies in any direct or immediate sense that events of some sort never happen—or in which stories of events of some sort are contrary to experience. If direct, immediate experience testifies to anything (truly or falsely) its testimony seems to be essentially "positive": It testifies that events of certain sorts *do* happen. One might of course point out that it is *reasonable to believe* of events of various sorts that events of those sorts never happen, and that the reasonableness of such beliefs must ultimately be based on experience. Having made this observation, one might propose an account of what it is for a story to be "contrary to experience" that is based on what it is reasonable to believe. It would go something like this: A story is contrary to one's experience if that story involves the occurrence of events of sorts such that given one's experience at the time one hears the story, it is reasonable for one to believe that events of those sorts never happen—or perhaps that it is highly improbable that such events ever happen (or, more simply, a story is contrary to one's experience if, given one's experience at the time one hears the story, it is reasonable for one to believe that the story is false or is highly improbable). And one might go on to spell out the concept "more contrary to one's experience" in terms of its being more unreasonable to believe one proposition than another. (One might say that $p$ is more contrary to one's experience than $q$ just in the case that although what it is reasonable to believe, on the basis of one's experience, is that $p$ and $q$ are both false, one should also believe that if one or the other of them is, after all, true, it is $q$. Thus, or so I would judge, Calvin's story about the handprints on the sofa is "more contrary to experience" than my story about the mileage my Cadillac got, and the "shaman" story is "more contrary to experience" than the story of Sally's quick mastery of French.)

I think, however, that it is reasonably clear that this is not what Hume means by "contrary to experience" and "more contrary to experience." Whatever he means by these phrases and the related phrases he uses, he means something much more concrete, much more immediate than this. For Hume, if one judges that a story of a man's rising from the dead is "contrary to one's experience," the experience that the story is contrary to is one's experience of the dead's staying dead, not the totality of one's experience of the world to date. But at least in my view, what it is now *reasonable for me to believe* about men's rising from the dead must be based on pretty nearly the whole of my experience to date (e.g., those experiences that are relevant to the truth or falsity of the principles of thermodynamics and the truth or falsity of judgments about the historical reliability of the New Testament and the authority of the Church). In any case, if this is what "contrary to experience" and "more contrary to experience" mean, there seems to me to be no very compelling reason for anyone to accept E1.

It may be reasonable to believe that if the Matthean story of the stilling of the storm is historical, then a miracle, a violation of the laws of nature, occurred. I certainly think that this would be the reasonable conclusion to draw from the truth of the story. But I do not think that this story is, by the terms of the definition we are considering, at least as contrary to experience as the "shaman" story is. In fact, I think that the Matthean story is *true* (and, of course, I think I am being reasonable in thinking that it is true), and I think that anyone who heard and believed the "shaman" story and whose experience of the world was otherwise like mine would be very unreasonable indeed. I am not trying to convince you, the reader, that these epistemological judgments are correct. I am saying only that nowhere in "Of Miracles" do I find any reason to suppose they are not correct. Hume's argument, after all, is of this general form: *Because* certain propositions are contrary to experience—*very* contrary to experience—it is unreasonable to accept them. And it is, to say the least, very hard to see how an argument of this form could be cogent if 'contrary to experience' *means* 'unreasonable to believe.'

I can think of no other plausible sense that can be given to the phrase 'contrary to experience'. I conclude, provisionally, that Hume's argument is a failure, owing to the fact that there is no sense that can be given to 'contrary to experience' such that E1 is compelling when 'contrary to experience' is interpreted in that sense. It should be noted that I do not claim to have shown that anyone is ever justified in believing a miracle-report. Indeed, I do not even claim to have addressed this question. It is perfectly consistent with everything I have said to suppose that anyone who believed any story that could conceivably count as a miracle-report (such as the Matthean story of the stilling of the storm) would be wholly unreasonable. I claim to have shown only that the argument of "Of Miracles" (as I understand the argument) does not establish either this conclusion or any other negative conclusion about the reasonableness of accepting miracle-reports.



## Notes

1. Included in Thomas V. Morris, ed., *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 211–235. Reprinted in Peter van Inwagen, *God, Knowledge, and Mystery: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 42–65.

2. "Of Miracles" is section X of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. There are numerous editions of the *Enquiry*. I have used the Open Court edition (La Salle, Ill.: 1907 and 1966), which, according to the publisher's preface is "an unannotated reprint . . . made from the second volume of the posthumous edition of 1777." No editor is given on the title page, but the preface notes that the editing was done by one Thomas J. McCormack. Because there are numerous editions of the *Enquiry* (and, of course, "Of Miracles" appears in whole or in part in scores of anthologies) and because "Of Miracles" is very short, I have not provided page citations for the very few direct quotations I have made.

3. The idea behind (b) is as follows. If two people consider the narrative, and one of them says, "If that story is true, at least one of the events it recounts was a miracle," and the other says, "Even if that story is true in every detail, there is some purely natural explanation for every event it recounts," the first speaker is being reasonable and the second unreasonable. Note that if the second speaker is indeed unreasonable, he nevertheless does not contradict himself, since by (a) it does not follow logically from the story that a miracle has occurred.

4. The purpose of clause (a) of the definition is to rule out of consideration as "miracle-reports" narratives that would satisfy clause (b) *only* because the narrative logically entailed that a miracle had occurred. Here are two examples of such narratives: "Last week Sally witnessed a miracle" and "A feather rose when the resultant of all the natural forces acting on it fell short by an insensible amount of the force requisite for that purpose."

5. It does not follow from our definition of 'miracle-report' that if a miracle-report is true, the people whose deeds and experiences are related in that report should believe that they have witnessed or been involved in a miracle. Consider the story of Jill's translation to Sydney (the second version, the version in which the translation is not described as miraculous). Suppose that we who hear the story should conclude that if the story is true, it recounts a miracle. (It follows from this supposition that the story is a miracle-report.) And suppose that the story *is* true. It does not follow that *Jill* should conclude from her experience that a miracle has happened. *We* know that if the story is true, Jill was translated instantaneously to Sydney. But it is not evident that Jill knows (or that she will presently come to know) that she has been translated instantaneously to Sydney—or even that it would be reasonable for her to believe that she has been. Perhaps she should believe that she is still in New York but dreaming or mad or that she was never in New York in the first place.

6. To continue the theme of the previous note: It may or may not be true that we should believe that if the events related in this story really happened, at least one of them was a miracle. But if this is what we should believe, it does not follow that if these events really happened, those who witnessed them should have regarded at least one of them as a miracle. For one thing, it is extremely doubtful whether anyone in the first century A.D. possessed the concept expressed by the modern word 'miracle'.

7. It will simplify the statement of our argument if in applying this definition we assume that 'miracle' and 'violation of a law of nature' are interchangeable. The equation of 'miracle' and 'violation' would be objectionable if my purpose were to defend the thesis that it was sometimes reasonable to believe that a miracle had occurred. This would be objectionable because it might be reasonable to believe that an event of type X had occurred and reasonable to believe that the occurrence of an event of type X required the violation of a law of nature, but *not* reasonable to believe that the "transgression of a law of nature" required by the occurrence of X was a consequence of a "particular volition of the Deity." My purpose, however, is to show that Hume's argument does not establish its conclusion, and not that this conclusion is false. And Hume's conclusion is (roughly) that it is unreasonable to believe any report of an event that would require a violation of a law—*whatever* the reason for that violation might be.

8. In my view, the two disjuncts of the definiens are independent: One can disbelieve something without assigning it a low probability (if in no other way, by assigning it no probability at all), and one can assign something a low probability without disbelieving it. A lot of people will want to say that these contentions represent a confused picture of the relation between belief and probability (I am thinking primarily of those who think that belief comes in degrees and that probabilities are measures of these degrees, a conception of the nature of belief and its relation to probability that I reject), but since nothing of substance in this essay turns on the thesis that the two disjuncts of the definiens are independent, I shall not defend it.

9. We shall later discuss the possible meanings of the phrase 'contrary to one's experience'. For the moment, let us simply assume that we understand this phrase.

10. As we did with the phrase 'contrary to experience,' let us for the present simply assume that we understand the phrase 'even more contrary to experience'. We shall later try to decide what it might mean.

11. As our examples show, not all contraventions are miracle-reports. Hume calls the stories that we are calling miracle-reports "miraculous." Contraventions that do not qualify as miraculous he calls "extraordinary" or "prodigies" or "marvelous."

12. Or so I shall assume for the sake of the example. Anyone who would deny this—that is, anyone who would regard the shaman story as a greater contravention than Carter's being a tool of malign extraterrestrial beings—may change the example.

13. Even the "memorable story related by Cardinal de Retz" and the accounts of those miracles "which were lately said to have been wrought in France upon the tomb of Abbé Paris .. . . " "And what have we [Hume asks after telling these two stories] to oppose to such a cloud of witnesses, but the absolute impossibility or miraculous nature of the events, which they relate." It is, incidentally, very hard to reconcile Hume's description of the testimony recorded in these two stories with a statement he had made a few pages before:



> For . . . there is not to be found in all history, any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestioned good-sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves; of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose in case of their being detected in any falsehood; and at the same time, attesting facts performed in such a public manner and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable. . . .

I suspect that what Hume means is that we cannot imagine evidence that would establish the persons who have reported some event as so reliable that it is logically impossible for that evidence to exist and those persons to have given a false report.

Chapter Seven

# *A review of* Without Proof or Evidence: Essays of O. K. Bouwsma,

*edited and with an introduction by J. L. Craft and Ronald E. Hustwit*

(Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984)

This book is a rather miscellaneous collection of O. K. Bouwsma's writings on religious topics. (One of the pieces, an introduction to a collection of Nietzsche's letters, is only indirectly connected with religion.) Most of the papers—if that is the word for them—in the book have never been published. All of them are worth reading, especially for Bouwsma fans. (But the classic, inimitable Bouwsma voice, the voice of "Descartes' Evil Genius" and "The Terms of Ordinary Language Are . . ." is heard continuously and at full strength in only one of the papers, "Adventure in Verification," wherein an epistemologically ambitious Greek climbs Mount Olympus to verify certain theological propositions. The classic voice is muted and is heard only intermittently in the other papers, possibly because Bouwsma takes Abraham and Moses and Saint Paul and even Saint Anselm more seriously than he takes Descartes or Grover Maxwell.)

In this book, one meets many of the same thoughts over and over again, twisted round one another, unexpectedly combined, and never presented twice in exactly the same way. I will concentrate on a few strands in Bouws-

ma's thought that one usually encounters as parts of the same tangle: his treatments of faith, defense, proof, evidence, obedience, revelation, and the Bible.

It is tempting to classify Bouwsma as a "Wittgensteinian fideist": He dislikes it when people raise the question whether religious beliefs are objectively true; he regards the concepts of "proof" and "evidence" as being wholly irrelevant to the life of the religious believer (and by the religious believer he always means someone who is a practicing Lutheran or Orthodox Jew or member of some other particular denomination); and he locates the tendency to raise questions about objective truth and, a fortiori, questions about proof and evidence, in certain mistakes about language. But unlike many who have been called Wittgensteinian fideists, he does not ascribe these tendencies to mistakes about "religious language," if that means the forms of words that believers use in talking with one another ('Pray for my husband'; '. . . I have sinned by my own fault in thought, word, and deed . . . '; 'Depart, O Christian soul, out of this world . . . '). These tendencies, rather, are a consequence of misunderstanding the language of Scripture.

We are like people who live in an enclosure, Bouwsma tells us. In the enclosure there are doors (so the inhabitants know about doors), and set in the outer wall of the enclosure there are things that look like doors but aren't, dummy doors we might call them. A lot of people spend a lot of time rattling the dummy doors or trying to pick their dummy locks. Some think that they have opened them. Others say that they have seen light through the chinks and cracks around the doors. Let us leave them to it. A most important fact is that we—let us say 'we'—have here with us in the enclosure the Bible. The trouble is, we don't know how to read it, or many of us don't. We don't know how to read the Bible because the Bible is God talking to us, and we don't know how to listen when God talks. The Bible is not (as some evidently suppose) a piece of primitive science or a work of fanciful history. It is a promise and a call. It is a promise of eternal life in Jesus Christ and a call to faith. It is also a sort of instruction manual for those who heed God's call and elect a life lived in faith. One of the mistakes made by those who do not know how to read the Bible is the idea that faith consists primarily in the acceptance of propositions, that faith is simply a certain sort of propositional belief. Faith, however, does not consist in propositional belief but in obedience. One of the most important aspects of the Bible is that it tells us many stories of lives lived in faith. That is the respect in which the Bible is an instruction manual for the faithful; it says: Faith is like this. The faithful whose stories are told in the Bible are just that cloud of witnesses partly enumerated in Hebrews 11. Of that cloud of witnesses Bouwsma particularly delights in Abraham and Moses—and that latter-day witness, Saint Paul.

It is rash to try to summarize Bouwsma's thought, but I am perverse enough to try. In a nutshell, his central thesis is that faith is obedience to



God and obedience to God logically excludes any search for (or even attention to) proof or evidence. Imagine this. The Lord says to Moses, "Go and gather the elders of Israel together. . . . " Moses reasons: "Let's see. The voice called unto me out of a bush that burns with fire and is not consumed. Therefore, there is probably a God and the voice is probably his and so I'd probably better do what it says." To act on such reasoning would not be obedience. (Perhaps it wouldn't be *disobedience*, but obedience is not the same as nondisobedience.)

If faith logically excludes any traffic in evidence and proof, can we therefore never *defend* our faith? ("Always be ready with your defense when you are called to account for the hope that is in you . . . "; 1 Pet. 3:15.) Yes, indeed. But for the faithful a defense is a confession of faith, a simple series of assertions about what God has commanded. The paradigm case is Saint Paul's defense of his actions before Festus and King Agrippa (Acts 26): "Then Paul stretched out his hand and began his defense. . . . 'I saw a light from the sky. . . . ' 'Paul, you are raving. . . . ' '[W]hat I am saying is sober truth'."

There is much in this that any Christian should agree with. Few Christians, if any, would say in so many words that the Christian faith can be proved. It has always been an article of that faith that it is a gift. The Christian (there are such) who amasses large bodies of evidence to prove to the unbiased inquirer that the faith is true or probable or more reasonable than its competitors (including atheism and agnosticism) would seem to be an imperfect adherent of that faith. Such a Christian is making a mistake. But there are other ways of looking at his mistake than Bouwsma's. I myself would say that his mistake was not about language but about people. Christians generally believe that we are ruined, defaced, twisted creatures; that we have made ourselves so by rebelling against God. (Bouwsma calls people who do not yet obey God "wild"—as in wild horses [p. 15]. But that is misleading. Wild horses are not in rebellion, either against God their maker or us their natural masters.) In particular, our minds and wills are twisted. How does a creature of deformed mind and will respond to evidence incompatible with the deformed picture of the world that is consequent on a deformed mind and will? We have a model in those whose minds and wills are even more twisted than is normal. How does the paranoid respond when shown good evidence for the thesis that his colleagues are not conspiring against him? How does the Nazi react to an offer to prove that Semitic and Teutonic blood cannot (contrary to official Nazi biology) be distinguished under a microscope? The questions answer themselves. How would fallen and unregenerate creatures react to good evidence that there is a God who acts in history and commands them to repent? Christ has answered this question: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead"

(Luke 16:31). (In context this means "though one rose from the dead before their very eyes.") A preoccupation with evidence may be unchristian not because a desire for evidence is logically incompatible with Christian faith and obedience but because from a Christian point of view evidence would be of little practical consequence.

But when Bouwsma deprecates proof in religion, he is not, or not usually, thinking of those people who try to prove or render probable the whole of the Christian faith. His usual target is those people who offer arguments for the existence of God (those who attempt to pick the dummy locks on the dummy doors). The project of attempting to prove the existence of God seems to him to be incompatible with obedience to God. (Suppose someone in the land of Midian had said to Moses, "Careful. You don't want to be taken in. What do you know about this voice, anyway?" Suppose Moses had responded with a brilliant version of the Ontological Argument. Would this have been a response of obedience?)

Attempts to prove the existence of God, unlike attempts to prove the faith as a whole, have been looked upon favorably by many great Christians. I am inclined to think that Bouwsma is right to regard a preoccupation with such arguments as unchristian, but, again, it seems to me that someone who thinks that he does God service by devising them is making a mistake not about language but about people. There is, of course, the old and valid point that metaphysical reasoning can be followed only by a few and the related point that owing to the ever-present possibility of discovering a mistake, real or fancied, in a chain of metaphysical reasoning, a faith built upon metaphysics is a house built upon sand. But if we may trust Saint Paul, there is a strong case for regarding metaphysical arguments as not only weak but as entirely useless. Unless I misunderstand Paul, he tells us that believers and unbelievers alike have available to them something much better than arguments for the existence of God, something independent of Holy Scripture and only indirectly connected with faith and obedience:

> For that which may be known of God is manifest among men; indeed God himself has made it manifest. The invisible attributes of God, his eternal power and deity, have been perceived since the creation of the world, being understood through created things. (Rom. 1:19–20)

(Incidentally, Bouwsma says [p. 143] that there is no such thing as "God in general" but only "the God of the Christians," "the God of the Jews," "the God of the Muslims," and so on. I expect he thought Saint Paul would have agreed. One wonders how he would rewrite this passage so as to make his and Paul's agreement on this point fully explicit.) I interpret Paul as saying that the existence and attributes of the invisible God can be seen in his creation much as the "invisible" emotions of our fellows can be seen in their faces. But if this is true, unbelievers have nevertheless succeeded in convincing themselves that they have seen no such thing. Anyone who has been able to do *that* will have little trouble in brushing aside a mere metaphysical argument. A person who really did believe that other living, moving human forms were mere unconscious automata could not be restored to normality by being taught the analogical argument for the existence of other minds.



Bouwsma's attitude toward faith and evidence, naturally enough, has consequences for his attitude toward revelation and knowledge. He suggests that the imparting of propositional knowledge to certain people is "telling secrets" and that God's revelation does not involve telling secrets (p. 15). Even if we accept this tendentious characterization of the imparting of propositional knowledge, we shall find scriptural difficulties with this suggestion. (Bouwsma is, after all, trying to show us how to read the Scriptures.) One might cite Mark 4:10–11, but this passage is rather a dark saying. Consider instead the famous discourse in 1 Corinthians about the things revealed by the Spirit. Paul begins by telling the Corinthians something that Bouwsma's picture of faith and revelation fits very well:

> [When I was with you] my message and my preaching did not depend upon the persuasiveness of human wisdom, but were a demonstration of power and the Spirit; and this was so that your faith might not rest upon human wisdom but upon the power of God.

But he goes on to say,

> But we do speak wisdom among those who are fully prepared for it. . . . [W]e speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the secret thing that God ordained before the ages for our glory. (1 Cor. 2:4–7)

But in any case we should not accept Bouwsma's identification of the imparting of propositional knowledge with telling secrets. I have learned a great deal about the state of my health from my doctor, but he has never, that I can remember, told me a secret.

I will close by noting that one important aspect of the relation between faith and evidence is entirely ignored in these papers. I concede that the papers are (as I have said) a miscellaneous collection and that it would be absurd to fault such a collection for failing to be a comprehensive treatment of any topic. Still, I think the point is worth remarking on. One finds no mention in these papers of the fact that various people have attempted to *disprove* the beliefs of Christians and other theists. Unbelievers have, for example, attempted to demonstrate that the existence of God is incompatible with pain and suffering; that religious beliefs are the products of depth-psychological or economic forces; that religious beliefs are incompatible with known scientific fact; that critical studies of central biblical texts show these texts to be corrupt or historically unreliable or to have been intended

by their authors in senses that do not support the theological superstructure that later generations have raised on them. I cannot discover in these papers any suggestion as to how a Christian should respond to arguments offered as disproofs of theism or as evidence of the scientific or historical untenability of Christian belief. Let me offer a rather extreme example. Suppose a Christian is assured by a freethinking acquaintance (who has read it in *Godless Sunday at Home*) that the Gospels were made up out of whole cloth by unscrupulous priests circa 400 A.D. Shall he say, "Maybe so, but I still intend to regard them as a promise of eternal life and a call to obedience?" No, he can't say *that*. He may, of course, assume that his acquaintance is lying or mistaken and put the matter out of his mind. That's all right. One who felt obliged to investigate *every* challenge to his convictions would be hard-pressed to find the time to act on his convictions. But if he finds he can't put the matter out of his mind or if it looks to him as if there might really be something to his acquaintance's thesis, then it would seem that he must search out evidence and evaluate it.

# Chapter Eight

# *A review of* Universes

## *by John Leslie*

(London: Routledge, 1989)

The cosmos appears to have been designed as an abode for life. This has been amply demonstrated by the marriage of cosmology and elementary-particle physics that is one of the most striking features of the current scientific scene. The universe evolved out of an initial singularity (or a "quantum fuzz" or a region of "imaginary time") some 15 thousand million years ago in accord with certain laws of nature. These laws contain apparently arbitrary numbers that are not determined by physical theory as it is currently understood but rather "have to be filled in by hand." One sort of example among many others would be the relative strengths of the various fundamental physical forces. (For example, electromagnetism is roughly $10^{39}$ times stronger than gravity. This ratio seems to be a brute fact. As far as theory goes, the exponent might have been 35 or 47 or any other number.)

In addition to the apparently arbitrary numbers that are contained in the laws of nature that govern the cosmos, the cosmos itself displays quantifiable and seemingly contingent features, such as its total relativistic mass, its very low initial entropy, and the number of "families" of elementary particles it contains. Many of these numbers have the following interesting feature: If they had been only very slightly different, there would have been no life. (Among the many untoward effects that a slight variation in the numbers could have produced are the following: a cosmos that lasted only a few seconds; a cosmos that contained no atoms; a cosmos that contained no stars; a cosmos in which all matter was violently radioactive.) It is very probable that future developments in theoretical physics will shorten the list of independent numerical parameters in the laws of nature and will thereby reduce the number of features of the laws of nature that could apparently have been otherwise. And it is possible that some of the features of

the cosmos that are at present seen as "boundary conditions" ("input" for the laws of nature), such as the number of particle families, will turn out to be consequences of the laws. Nevertheless, the degree of apparent contingency exhibited by the cosmos and its laws is impressive. Even if future developments in physics greatly reduce this apparent contingency, it looks as if there will be plenty left. It looks as if whatever the future of physics and cosmology may hold, only a tiny region within the "space" defined by all possible variations in the numerical parameters that figure in the laws and cosmic boundary conditions contains life-permitting cosmoi.

Why does the cosmos look as if it had been designed as an abode for life? The most obvious explanation is that the universe looks as if it had been designed because it really was designed. But Darwin has shown how apparent design can be only apparent. (This conceptual point is independent of the question whether the theory of evolution by natural selection can account for the actual course of terrestrial evolution.) The theory of natural selection cannot be applied directly to the problem of the apparent design of the cosmos, since universes do not reproduce themselves with random hereditable variations. (Or do they? Since I wrote the preceding sentence, one of my former colleagues at Syracuse University, the physicist Lee Smolin, has speculated that universes may do just that.) But some of the features of Darwinian explanations of apparent design in nature are so abstract and powerful that they can be lifted out of the context of biology and applied to the physical world as a whole.

A purposive, rational being can survey a set of possibilities and, after due deliberation, cause one or more of them to become actual. Chance, on the other hand, may generate a large number of diverse actualities, and some "selection factor" may then weed out all but a few of these actualities. Under certain circumstances, the "surviving" actualities may be very much like the actualities that a purposive, rational being would have chosen to actualize after surveying a set of possibilities. Thus may chance and a selection factor conspire to mimic purposive design. In the theory of natural selection, actualities are weeded out by being destroyed or at any rate prevented from reproducing. If, however, we are interested in explaining how apparent design may be only apparent, we are not forced to postulate a selection factor that weeds the garden of chance-generated actualities by allowing the continued existence only of actualities that exhibit apparent design; all that we really need is a selection factor that allows us to *observe* only chance-generated actualities that exhibit apparent design. All that we need is an "observational selection effect."

Suppose that an enormous number of actual cosmoi of wildly varying properties were generated by chance, so many and so various that it was statistically unsurprising that a few of them had the delicately balanced set of features that permit a cosmos to contain life. *Our* cosmos, of course, would be one of the rare life-permitting ones. And suppose that we are unable to observe any of the others, the silent majority. (There could be many reasons for our inability to observe them. Perhaps the spacetime curvature of our cosmos "hides" them, or perhaps the others are simply too far away, or perhaps cosmoi exist one at a time, like beads on a temporal string.) If all this were the case, it would look to us as if our cosmos were the only cosmos and as if it had been carefully "tuned" to permit the existence of life. But this would be an illusion, generated by the interplay of chance (which blindly produces the enormous variety of actual cosmoi) and an observational selection effect (which allows us to see only our own cosmos, a cosmos that must, of course, be suitable for life).



In this superb book, John Leslie argues that the fine-tuning of the cosmos presents us with a choice between the two "hypotheses" we have stated above: the "Design Hypothesis" and the "World Ensemble Hypothesis." He does not, however, understand the Design Hypothesis in quite the way that one might imagine, since he takes seriously the idea that the mere "ethical requiredness" of the existence of life might, unmediated by the actions of any conscious, purposive being, be responsible for the existence of a unique fine-tuned cosmos; and he is willing to count that possibility as a case of "design." In addition to the thesis that (1) the fine-tuning of the cosmos presents us with a choice between the Design Hypothesis (so understood) and the World Ensemble Hypothesis, the central theses of the book are the following: (2) Science cannot provide us with any decisive reason for accepting one of the hypotheses and rejecting the other; (3) each of the two hypotheses has an equal initial right to be taken seriously; (4) the attempts of various philosophers to show that there is nothing puzzling about the fine-tuning of the cosmos and its laws (nothing that requires any sort of explanation) are ludicrously bad; (5) neither hypothesis can be seen on philosophical grounds to enjoy a decisive advantage over the other.

The book has many virtues. To begin with, it is vigorously and clearly written and beautifully organized. Among its more substantive virtues is its very solid instruction in the relevant physics and cosmology. (The scientific accuracy of the book has been vouched for by an impressive array of experts.) It should be stressed, however, that anyone who is willing to take it as given that current physics and cosmology represent the cosmos and its laws as fine-tuned to support life can skip the solid—perhaps for some tastes too, too solid—instruction and have no difficulty in following the philosophical arguments that are based on this assumption. These philosophical arguments strike me as being of a very high order. I can especially recommend Leslie's critique of those philosophers who have argued that any given combination of values of physical parameters is as probable as any other, and that therefore there *could not* be anything about the actual set of parameters displayed by the laws of nature that required an explana-

tion. (Compare: There could be nothing that required an explanation in someone's being dealt four consecutive royal flushes, one in each suit, since the probability of such a sequence of hands is equal to the probability of being dealt *any* four particular hands successively.) In evaluating these arguments, Leslie makes very effective use of the principle that if a certain state of affairs *strongly suggests* a certain "tidy" explanation (as someone's being dealt four royal flushes in a row does, and someone's being dealt four mediocre poker hands in a row does not), then it is not reasonable to contend that that state of affairs requires no explanation.

Leslie also makes the very important point (which I am pretty sure has not been made by anyone else) that to argue that the cosmos exhibits apparent design, we need not employ the premise that only a minuscule subset of the whole set of possible cosmoi are life-permitting. It suffices to argue that only a minuscule subset of the possible cosmoi "in the local area" are life-permitting. This is an important point because it might for all we know be that there are laws of nature and cosmos designs radically and unimaginably different from "our" laws and the design of our cosmos. Indeed, it might be that practically all possible cosmoi are radically different from ours, and it might be that practically all of the radically different cosmoi are life-permitting. How can we know that this is not so? If we cannot, we are not in a position to employ the premise that only a minuscule subset of the set of all possible cosmoi are life-permitting. But if only a minuscule subset of the possible cosmoi that are "in the local area"—that differ from our cosmos only in being governed by laws of nature with the same general structure as our laws but with different numerical parameters "plugged into" them, and in having different boundary conditions for the laws to operate on—are life-permitting, *this* is a fact that demands an explanation, whether or not there are radically different possible cosmoi.

Here is an analogy. Suppose that there is a target that has an arrow sticking into it. Does this fact require an explanation? Well, not if the world is either chock-full of targets or chock-full of people shooting arrows at random. But if the world is large and if there is only one target and only one arrow, then an explanation is required for the fact that the sole arrow is sticking into the sole target. Suppose now that the world is chock-full of targets, with the exception of one area a mile across that contains but a single target, right at its center. And suppose that there is an arrow protruding from that target and no arrows to be found anywhere else in the milewide area. In this case, too, an explanation is required. And if we inhabit an area a mile across, containing right at its center a single target sporting the only arrow to be found in our little area (the rest of the world being hidden from us), we need not, in attempting to answer the question whether this state of affairs requires an explanation, consider the fact that, *for all we know*, the world outside our parochial one-target area is chock-full of targets. We reason soundly when, without considering speculations about what lies outside the area we can observe, we conclude that there must be some explanation for the fact that there is an arrow in *this* target.



The only reservations I have about Leslie's book concern his Neoplatonism, his (to me) very odd idea that the ethical requiredness of a state of affairs can bring about the realization of that state of affairs without the mediation of the action of conscious, purposive beings. In this book and in many previous publications (see especially his *Value and Existence*, Blackwell, 1979), Leslie has tried to make this idea intelligible, but he has not got through to me. For my part, despite his best efforts, the thesis that ethical requiredness can, in itself, be *effective*, remains as puzzling as the thesis that the beauty and sublimity of Gothic architecture (considered simply as a *possible* system of architectural design) could bring about the existence of cathedrals and colleges and guildhalls, without the mediation of the action of conscious, purposive beings. Ethical requiredness, to my mind, is an objective feature of certain states of affairs (although, as a Christian, I accept the teaching of my religion that ethical requiredness is not a feature of the state of affairs *There being created rational beings* and, a fortiori, not a feature of the state of affairs *There being conscious organic life*); it is nonetheless an abstraction, and abstractions are, so to speak, purely passive.

It is sometimes tempting to talk otherwise. Gödel, for example, has said that the axioms of set-theory "force themselves upon the mind as true." But if this statement is to have any chance of saying something ontologically coherent, it must mean that the mind, in contemplating the axioms of set-theory, thereby actualizes a powerful and unopposed disposition, which is a part of its own concrete character, to assent to them. All of the causality involved in this operation belongs to the disposition, which is a disposition of the concrete individual mind or of the concrete individual being whose mind it is. It may be that the axioms of set-theory objectively possess a feature called, say, "intuitive obviousness." If so, this feature of the axioms cannot affect even the flow of electrons inside a mathematician's skull. It may be that Christian theology is wrong and the state of affairs *There being conscious organic life* objectively possesses the feature "being ethically required." If so, this feature of that state of affairs is incapable of *affecting* even the course of thoughts in the mind of an ethically sensitive Demiurge, much less of bypassing the Demiurge and bringing about the existence of life on its own. (Leslie, by the way, is the Neoplatonic analogue of a deist: He does not think that the ethical requiredness of certain states of affairs ever has any "local" effects, not even such local effects as an awareness of the ethical requiredness of these states of affairs in the minds of rational beings. His theory limits the effects of ethical requiredness to imposing laws and boundary conditions on the cosmos as a whole: Ethical requiredness does just what the God of the deists does.) I don't mean to suggest that

Leslie is unaware of these points or fails to discuss them at length. (See chapter 8 of the book under review, as well as *Value and Existence.*) I am saying only that I remain unconvinced.

However this may be, *Universes* is an important book and should be a part of the working library of anyone seriously interested in the Argument from Design.

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